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CAPTAIN CAVALIER

"AS YOU ARE, GENTLEMEN," HE CALLED COOLLY.

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CAPTAIN CAVALIER

BY

JACKSON GREGORY

AUTHOR OF

THE DESERT THOROUGHBRED,
THE EVERLASTING WHISPER,
TIMBER-WOLF, ETC.

GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

Published by Arrangement with Charles Scribner's Sons

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Printed in the United States of America

Dear Hal Waldo,

A long way from you in golden California, I am tempted to subject to a very severe strain those bonds of friendship which tug the stronger with widening distances, and all without your sanction to inscribe to you this romance of old California and young Captain Cavalier.

Jackson Gregory.

Stratford-on-Avon,
England.
March 31, 1927.

CAPTAIN CAVALIER

CHAPTER I

LIKE some bedraggled bird of ill omen, the little man, perched on the water-butt up-ended in the white sand of the cove, stared out to sea. Here was Sir Harry, as his fellows called him—Sir Harry Hawk. Since the name was acceptable to them and did not offend him, let it stand. Certain it is that this Sir Harry had found it of advantage to sail under so many an alias in his time that he himself must have been hard beset to recall the original and rightful cognomen; almost equally certain that, had he sought to prove the remotest connection to any titled house, he must have run so far back in history as to bring up a deal nearer Adam and Eve than this day whose sun was now near setting upon him. And most certain of all, a fact readily conceded, was this: of a downright rascally crew this Sir Harry Hawk was the most thoroughgoing rascal of them all.

At once sinister and complacent, he amused himself by playing a light-hearted rat-tat-too upon the cask's staves with his bare and dirty heels, the while he cocked a pair of very small and very bright blue eyes at the glinting, dancing, shimmering blue of the Pacific. Thus he was in a position to note, not without a bit of crude poetical appreciation, how the westering sun was transmuting a portion of the azure in the great

bowl into coppery gold; to speculate profoundly upon the vanity of all outward show; to arrive at the sound conclusion that though before him miles and miles of low horizon were changing swiftly into a bright field of gold, there were times when such fool's gold was of vastly less worth than a battered copper penny in a man's pocket. He sighed, having neither pocket nor penny; yet all the while kept thumping out his lively rat-a-tat-tat-too upon his empty cask.

If one must give the devil his due, then why not extend the same consideration to Sir Harry, who was the devil's own? He was little by stature, littler by nature; he was as treacherous as quicksand, and as cruel; the long knife half hidden among his scanty rags knew every whit as much of the quality of mercy as did he. Yet withal he had the one saving grace of a merry heart; when others drew long faces or grew black-browed in rage or despair, he skipped and made his quips, or lifted a pure sweet tenor voice in snatches of ribald song. When others lost all hope, he made them laugh with his vulgar humor; when, as now, there was little to eat and almost nothing to wear, with November bronzing the acorns and painting scarlet the wild holly berries in the mountains behind him, he gnawed at his raw chapped knuckles and waxed musical. For which rare qualities may much be forgiven Sir Harry, who, though he never made the world any better, did at times make it seem brighter. As the sinking sun out yonder caused low banks of sodden fog to shimmer like gossamer gold, so did Sir Harry strive to invest with his own inner radiance the bleak gloom of circumstance engulfing him and his companions.

"A man goes to sea in a ship," mused Sir Harry complacently. "The ship goes to smash on the rocks. Well, what happens? What wreckage floats ashore goes into our fires to keep us warm. That's good. In the same wreck we lose our captain and half the crew, drowned in a dozen fathoms of stormy water. Bad for them. Lucky for me. I make myself captain. *That's* good. Cast away on the rocks of California, where we had counted upon coming full armed, pillaging. Well, at any rate, we've got our heels in California soil." (Bare heels, not boot heels—Rat-a-tat!) "Half starved and half frozen half the time; yet gorged and warm now and then. Most of all, beginning to sniff fat feasting and full coffers. Good, Sir Harry; ve-ry good. And already hand in glove with a black Spanish traitor who is ready and eager to lend us a hand to slit the gullet of his fair California." (Rat-a-tat; rat-a-tat; rat-a-tat-tat-*tat!*)

He spun about, spurned his cask—it was ever Sir Harry's way to bestow a farewell kick upon anything he no longer needed—and while the cask rolled one way he strode off another. Close under a steep cliff, in a space further sheltered by big black rocks, blazed a rollicking ruddy bonfire, brightening all about it, even to the score of sinister figures gathering closer as the sunset air grew chillier. A pretty motley they made, these castaways from the ill-fated vessel that had gone down in a storm some miserable weeks before; all that were left of a crew of the whilom saucy little craft which, given to dark and devious ways, had borne in her time as many names as even Sir Harry himself. *La Libertad* had been her last, when dignifying herself with the title of a privateer she had sailed forth under

a Buenos Aires flag. Now, when her survivors spoke of her, as often they did with deep-sea curses, they named her the *Sally Ann,* the *Nutria,* the *Day Star.* Sir Harry alone ever called her the *Lass o' London.* But, give her what name they chose, she was but a memory.

But though now she had become an adventuring ground for scuttling crab and swift-steering fish, one might guess something of her from one good look at this motley of men who had made home of her deck. Through the rags and tatters and oddly fashioned garments of deer-skins their brown and black and yellow hides proclaimed them for what they were: riffraff from widely scattered unsavory ports of the world. Bringing a fresh log for the fire was a huge Kanaka, naked to the waist, his dark body gleaming, his eyes like glittering beads, his ragged black hair wind-blown about his thick, muscular shoulders, a cutlass through a bit of rope about his middle, one long ruby earring left him of the former twain to dangle swinging against his bull neck. Squatting at an outer rim of coals in a pair of sandals made of pieces of wood and strips of deer-hide, a Chinaman, almost as big a man as Kanaka George, was roasting acorns; squinting his eyes against the heat of the fire he lifted his upper lip in a fashion to display his black, broken fangs in a peculiarly horrible sort of grin. He had gotten ashore with a brace of pistols, beautiful duelling instruments which had come overseas at an earlier date upon the debonair person of a young Spanish dandy; Sarong, the Island Chinaman, was ever willing to tell the interested the whole story of how he had strangled and then knifed the debonair young Spaniard in

order to come by the enticing weapons. He wore them now, as Kanaka George carried his cutlass, tied about his middle.

There was an Irishman from Cork—long, long from Cork—whom they called Paddy, one who had a voice like an angry parrot's, and who swore in seven tongues, and was never known to have a happy thought or a cheerful word for man or beast. There was a Polynesian boy not over ten or twelve evil years of age, whom they had stolen from an unnamed island in the far South Seas to be cabin-boy and aid to the cook; a gaunt, hollow-eyed, crinkly haired son of Satan, who had knifed his man in the back before they had ended the first drunken carousal at the first opportunity. He wore a necklace of shark's teeth, a square of torn canvas with a hole through the middle for his head, and little else; he was eternally shivering with cold and slashing his eyes back and forth in his unsleeping vigilance for an extra scrap of food.

Sir Harry Hawk, standing with hand on hip, a thumb crooked jauntily about the wooden handle of his curved knife, regarded these and their companions as a man to-day might regard them were they set down for him in a big life-sized painting; something detachedly, with an eye for this detail here, that one yonder, with full appreciation of the massed effect, with mild, complacent satisfaction. Thus he affected to cast them into one group, himself into another. The wind stirred softly the tightly braided hair that hung between his shoulder-blades, and caused the pendants—set with imitation diamonds—in his close little ears to vibrate and wink in the firelight.

"Where's Nosegay?" he bugled at them, his clear

voice lifted in opposition to the dull sullen roar of the breakers along the white beach. "Has he come in yet? Has he sent word?"

Such was the obvious lack in haste of any answer returned him, such the studied preoccupation of each of the men who heard him, that Sir Harry's little glinting blue eyes grew even smaller in swift speculative suspicion. So hearing, they pretended not to hear, did they? Beyond the fire four men squatted around a tiny plot of smoothed sand and played at dice; they had glanced up, then down at the falling cubes. He had heard a low mutter from them, not unlike the deep rumble of the Pacific. He cocked his head jauntily to one side and appeared to smile. Meantime he took swift stock of the situation—as he had done so many a time already! Hunger, that was what irked them, inactivity on top of that. Lack of the cosey comforts to which such gentlemen as his were accustomed: deep feather beds at times of successful sacking of defenseless little ports, unlimited sweet wines and cakes and Spanish *dulces;* all those exquisite delights to win and squander which they risked their hides and the palely glimmering spirits dwelling within. Yes, they were getting bored; that chiefly was the thing that pricked them and made them silent now before him. He'd wager that until he stepped forward among the black encircling rocks every tongue had wagged hotly enough.

Had he not been wool-gathering in the beginning he would have done well to have taken a moment in which to gauge their mood before flinging a question at them. But he had spoken, he was their captain, and . . .

With a sudden bound, like the dart of a hawk, he leaped upon the boy whom they had dubbed Shark's Tooth or Toothy for short. He caught the youth by the throat with one sinewy hand, while with the clinched fist of the other he smote him between the furtive eyes. The boy stiffened, then crumpled, and hung a sagging limp mass of useless flesh from Sir Harry's left hand.

"I asked the little heathen a question," said Sir Harry sweetly, as he let fall the victim of his discipline. "It's bad luck for a man to forget his tongue when his captain asks him something."

Kanaka George muttered. His words were unintelligible, being in a savage dialect which none here took the trouble to study, yet his meaning was clear enough. Always there had been a sort of blood bond between him and the boy. The tone of his deep bass voice meant:

"Why jump a boy when there's men about?"

Now Sir Harry had not made himself chief in command over these outlaws by simpering and saying, "If you please." He now dropped his hand back to his knife, and brought his smiling face so close to Kanaka George's that in the dusk it looked almost as if the two noses touched. Kanaka George towered above him, but Sir Harry lifted himself on tiptoe. George's cutlass was many times the length of Sir Harry's curved knife; but their two bodies stood so close together now that length of blade brought no advantage. If a blow was to be struck, one blow would suffice, and the knife was quicker.

"You said something?" said Sir Harry pleasantly.

The Kanaka mumbled. Sir Harry repeated his initial question:

"Where's Nosegay, George?"

"No come," said the Kanaka sullenly.

"Sent no word?"

"No," growled George.

Sir Harry withdrew, very watchful all the while, never dropping his eyes from the sombre black eyes of the Kanaka until well beyond the reach of a swishing cutlass. He had carried his point, and that was enough for the present moment; he was too wise a little man to seek to go to any unreasonable lengths with a pack of hungry savage devils like this residue of his former captain's crew. When he deemed it safe to spin on his heel he turned his back upon the disgruntled encampment, setting his face toward the thick-timbered mountains rising so steeply from the shore-line. The pines and redwoods high up yonder were still bathed in the golden glory of the sun.

He scrambled up a cliff, hooking his toes in crevices, following a familiar way. As he had noted before, going without boots had its advantages; it made a man's soles like leather. Climbing upward as agilely as a monkey, he was soon at the top of the cliffs and on the steep if less sheer flank of the mountain. Here was a crooked path trodden by the feet of his own men, and he hurried along it among trees and boulders. He appeared to ascend as rapidly as the sun descended. Shadows thickened down there among the jagged black rocks while he mounted into a region of golden light and soft shadows. In a deep-cleft ravine a mad brooklet, all white froth and racing fury, leaped seaward. He stopped, drank, straightened to glance

keenly into the woods all about him, and hurried on again along the path.

A little dove crooned softly; he saw its pearly iridescent beauty where its pretty pink feet clung to a dead limb; his eyes gleamed hungrily. A dozen rods farther on he startled an antlered buck which flung up its noble head, sniffed and trotted away into the mysterious precincts of a darkening wood; at the sight the saliva actually drooled from the corners of Sir Harry's mouth. To go hungry when these forested uplands were fat with savory game!

"The devil roast me this black Spanish Don," he growled savagely. For, put him off by himself, with none to regard, and Sir Harry Hawk could cast as evil a look as any.

Such were his haste and the tireless vigor of his spare body, he was on the crest of a certain ridge while the sunlight still spattered the black earth with mosaics. From here one had a wide expanse of view; limitlessly to seaward; to considerable broken distance in the east. He stopped, set his two forefingers in his mouth and whistled long and shrilly. Before the echo died an answering whistle came from the wood at his left. And after the call emerged Nosegay himself.

He was a good-humored dunce of a fellow; a glance told it. Not a fool entirely, but one who grinned often and vacantly, whose big body had seemingly developed at the expense of his brain and whose nose had grown at the cost of his other features. A nose of the type known as bottle or bulbous; as bright-hued as a robin's breast. A large, wide, generous and good-humored nose. It was its owner's single and fond earthly pride; he had ever been content to follow it where it led and

gave it all loyalty as the best of leaders. It was a rare instrument for sniffing savory odors, for inviting to the feast. He had waxed fat and paunchy hearkening to its counsels, and gave it fuller credence than most men give their minds.

Like the rest of the little band, this Nosegay was dressed as circumstance made possible. Had one looked upon him, not taking into consideration the nose or the face of him, it would have been logical to deem him a Father Franciscan. For the Franciscan gown of iron gray garbed him, its cowl covered the unkempt hair of his small round head, its corded girdle belted his protuberant middle. This gown, so ably aiding his sheaths of fat in keeping him warm, had been the reward of some nights ago when he had faithfully followed his nose. It had led him across a number of miles of pleasant wildwood to a Spanish mission; in the dark he had managed to steal certain morsels of food, and this bit of clothing where it was hung to dry.

"Nothing heard of our Spanish friend yet?" demanded Sir Harry sharply.

"Aye, aye, captain," puffed Nosegay. "I made him out in the gap not more than the quarter of an hour ago. Riding this way and in haste. He'll be with us any minute."

Sir Harry regarded him coldly.

"And the man I left up here with you to bring me word? What of him?"

"We saw some young conies in the thicket a while ago," beamed Nosegay. "As fat as butter. I set him making snares. He has not come back yet."

Here was rank dereliction of duty. Yet there came

no explosion, mindful as was Sir Harry of maintaining discipline. For at the moment there was the sound of galloping hoofs, and into full view, not a hundred yards away, rode the expected visitor.

"Go snare your fat rabbits," commanded the captain tersely. "Leave me to talk alone with this *hidalgo.*"

"Aye, aye, sir," puffed he of the priestly garb, whose soul was ever attuned to the spoils rather than the stratagems of war. And turned back whither he had come, leaving Sir Harry to stride off to a meeting with the galloping horseman.

CHAPTER II

Sir Harry, for all his jovial soul, was hard beset to keep the worm of rancor out of his heart as he watched the oncoming man and horse; a murderously passionate glint flickered for an instant in his hard little eyes. Here, at the moment of his own distress, was altogether too much luxuriousness and plump living.

The horse, a fine spirited black, was a rare beauty for even this California, where men had few higher cares than the breeding of fine horses. But the captain, no equestrian himself, bestowed upon the superb animal only a crass, animal regard, like that which the native Indians turned upon horseflesh; noting its fine sleekness and thinking how a hungry man might devour the creature, well stewed, and thereafter make a warm cloak of the glossy hide. The rider himself he stared at with a leer of pure animosity; that is, until the newcomer was close enough to be able to read his expression, when again his eyes cleared and he became in appearance both joyous and friendly.

Here was Sir Harry's "black Spaniard." A gentleman with thin hawkish nose, high-arched fine black brows, crisp black curly side whiskers extending in a neatly trimmed line from in front of the ear well down to the point of the clean-shaven jaw. The thick hair, brushed straight back from the white forehead, disappeared under the black silk handkerchief, bound

tight about the head, its tied ends hanging just behind the left ear, the whole surmounted by a hat of the finest vicuña, broad, black, wide, low-crowned.

Sir Harry kept on smiling; but all the while his eyes took stock of an over-great display of elegant affluence to sit lightly on his pinched stomach. The dangling ends of the rich scarlet silken scarf irritated him as a toreador's scarf piques a bull; here was a flaunting to raise the gorge of any gentleman adventurer. The silver buckles winking at the knees, the rich silver chasings making the long-rowelled spurs sparkle, the argent gleam of the savage Spanish bit, all this irked Sir Harry. Therefore his treacherous blue eyes brightened like those of a man warmed with glad friendliness. He could not forbear, however, treating himself to one bit of luxury all his own. Still smiling, extending his hand with every mark of delight, he cried out heartily—but in English, which he knew his visitor could not understand:

"With all the joy in life I'd cut your damned throat, rob you of your cloak, and eat your horse!"

The other bowed deeply, lifted his hat, and now somewhat hastily withdrew his hand.

"You will pardon me, señor? I do not understand." he said in Spanish.

Sir Harry laughed good-humoredly. In the southern tongue he retorted promptly:

"Forgot myself, Don Nicolas. What I said was that your arrival is so welcome that you make it seem like sunrise instead of sunset. I kiss your hand, and trust that you slept well last night, dined well to-day, and drank well both times."

Thereafter the captain remembered to confine his

remarks to the Spanish language, one which he knew as well as any other, since the better part of his life had been spent in smuggling and other illicit operations up and down the Spanish Pacific coasts.

"I see," he ran on swiftly, "that you have a bundle tied to your saddle strings. Is it perhaps——?"

Turning in the saddle, Don Nicolas undid it, and in another moment Sir Harry squatted over it on the ground, undoing the parcel. He sniffed pleasurably, glanced over his shoulder a couple of times to make sure that none of his companions in hardship was about to mark what he did, then sat down with the whole roast fowl in his lap, the thick greenish bottle unstoppered at his side, the sheaf of fresh tortillas drooping over a bare knee. Don Nicolas, well fed himself, watched the gluttonous attack upon the savory viands with bold black contemptuous eyes.

"What news?" demanded Sir Harry, his mouth full, the bottle of red wine half-way to his greasy lips.

"None," returned Don Nicolas insolently, his the take-it-or-leave-it air of one who had neither explanations nor apologies to make. His horse, ever mincing and prancing and head-tossing, curvetted now so that the graceful figure in the saddle swayed far out, and the azure-lined cloak from his shoulders fell back; thus was Sir Harry afforded an excellent view of the brace of pearl-handled pistols thrust into the sash about his middle. Also, not to be overlooked by a man so keen-eyed as the captain, there was a dagger of a very engaging length and sharpness.

Sir Harry quaffed deeply; a mellow gurgling sound was followed by a deep sigh. He wiped his red-stained mouth upon the back of his hand.

"I do what a man can here," he said simply, beginning again to tear at the succulent, golden-brown fowl. "Yet my dogs pull hard at the leash. Should they break loose and run wild——" He lifted a shoulder to indicate that thus he let slip all responsibility.

Don Nicolas lifted a lip at him. His own shrug, the shrug of an arrogant Southerner, the only truly eloquent shrug in the world, expressed ten times the meaning of the other's shoulder-twitch.

"Threaten me, señor," he said with tart directness, "and you die an early death."

How Sir Harry beamed at that!

"Threaten my friend the Señor Nicolas Vara!" he exclaimed. "Never! A warning between friends is not amiss, eh? My dogs, I tell you, señor, are hungry dogs. They'd set their teeth in the hand that fed them. I've got them by the scruff of the neck to-day, but to-morrow? Who knows!"

"Yet you would do best, señor, to hold them well; to-morrow and to-morrow's to-morrows until that which we await comes to pass. There is, as you know, little love for the foreigner in California just now. It is but a few leagues north to the capital at Monterey, where His Excellency surrounds himself with his soldiers; a few leagues further to the south is the *presidio* at Santa Barbara, where the comandante has yet other soldiers. Let word of your presence be blown about, and we have soldiers from the north and soldiers from the south shutting down upon you like a big pair of shears. *Snip!* Like that."

"None readier than I to grant the wisdom of all you say," admitted Sir Harry affably. "As to my fine fellows down there on the beach, they have neither

wit nor wisdom; they are all mouth and belly. They are soft-living fellows who would house themselves before the real winter sets in, and we've had our warnings already that it is on the way. They know that the *hacienda* where just now you are visiting is but a short distance set back from the coast. They know that the Mission San Antonio is beyond the *hacienda* but a shorter distance. They know what may be done in a swift night raid, little armed as they are. Oh, I tell you, they are a stupid and impatient lot."

"*Demonio!*" growled Nicolas Vara. "What do you ask then?"

Sir Harry sprang to his feet, widely waving the meat and drink in his two hands. Now he was a man alert, eager, full of fire.

"What is it we want? I'll put a name to it for you!" His blue eyes began to glimmer like blue fires. "We want all that is to be come at by a bold stroke, one stricken swift and hard and true. We want Monterey sacked, as has long been promised us! We want to kindle a fire of houses that will warm us the coldest night! We want wine, not by the cursed penny flask but by the thousand of hogsheads. We want to see bright golden double doubloons rolling in the candle-light. We want to take up living, señor, where we left off when the *Lass o' London* went down among the black rocks out there. We want soft beds and warm covers and fine clothes to wear. We want to see a bit of hot red blood running once more, and to hear the pretty music which goes up from a seaport put under the sword. We want everything there is; and for an end, our own pick of your big-eyed, soft-

eyed *señoritas* to sing to us when we are too drunk to stand, to play for us on their guitars, to minister. That's what we want, señor; and that, sir, by God, is what we'll have!"

He drained his bottle and flung it to earth savagely; where it struck it splintered into a thousand fragments, and no fragment shone more coldly or flashed a more sinister light than those two small bright blue eyes of Sir Harry Hawk.

Don Nicolas stirred uneasily in the saddle. Here, in all these weeks, was the first time this half-naked outcast had once lifted a voice to that tune. The fellow grew bold; or was it as he had said, were his followers rebelling, forcing him along in desperation? Or, by any chance, was it merely the strong wine tossed into a drawn stomach?

When in doubt, there are times when a man may do no better than laugh. Don Nicolas laughed now, and tossed out his hands helplessly.

"You have the soul of an artist, señor," he mocked. "What a picture you draw! Poor little Monterey in flames yielding all that rich entertainment! Silks and satins, eh? Red wines and golden doubloons and lovely *señoritas!* You dream, señor; but *por dios,* you dream nobly! Hark you." He leaned forward, reining in his horse sharply, speaking in a fierce, passionate undertone. "California herself goes almost as naked and hungry as your *piratas* down yonder in the cove. Who knows this better than you? With Mexico in rebellion these seven or eight years against Spain, with Mexico torn two ways like a blood-soaked banner, the Insurgents pulling one way, the Loyalists pulling the other, who has had a thought to our Cali-

fornia? The supply ships come no more; no one sends us sugar and flour, clothing and the other things. We go destitute. Spain, claiming to be the great mother, should feed and supply us; she does nothing. We are left to starve. And yet, fools of Californios, we yell ourselves hoarse with *Vivas! vivas! vivas!* for Spain."

"Not you," muttered Sir Harry. "If I can't trust you for much else, I can stake my goodly wager on your being hot for rebellion. As I do! But we begin with poesie and end with politics," he concluded humorously. "I've told you what I want. What my men want."

"Well, you shall have it," grumbled Don Nicolas. "Fat or lean as you may find her, Monterey is yours for the looting. But you must await your time."

"We have waited. Many weeks. We have been burned by the sun; we have shivered with the chill. We have hungered. And think you we are minded to wait without end?"

"I would to God your captain had not been drowned in the wreck!" cried Don Nicolas. "I know well the kind of man he was; the boldest blade roving the Pacific, yet one to bide his time in patience when must be. And one who knew the trick to whip his dogs down when they snarled." He fixed a baleful glare of his prominent dark eyes upon that captain's successor in command, demanding bitterly: "Having sailed with him, why haven't you learned something of the sure wisdom of Captain Cavalier?"

"Oho!" cried Sir Harry Hawk, red with anger. "Oho-ho! You'd have me dead in his place, would you? You'll be forever telling me of what you've heard and heard and heard of Captain Cavalier? Well, he's dead enough now and hell take him. And

you'll talk with Captain Sir Harry Hawk, baronet, or you'll talk with none!"

He bristled; a nervous hand half drew the curved knife. But Don Nicolas, watching him stonily, told him with a glance of his own blazing eyes that if he judged the moment ripe for bloodshed he was welcome to be about it.

"You will wait until I give the signal, Captain Hawk; or you will act without my support. I am not ready to strike. You alone would be taken by the governor's soldiers; if you kept a shut mouth they would scarcely do more than judge you a crew of smugglers and put you on ship for San Blas. If you grow indiscreet—or if any ugly rumors should happen to attach themselves to you!—you find yourselves taken out of *carcel* one by one to be shot. Myself when I have a word from Bouchard——"

"Bouchard!" cried Sir Harry. "Bouchard, say you? Damme, man, what of Hypolite Bouchard?"

He was as tense as a taut wire.

"He comes soon," said Don Nicolas coolly. "When he comes it will be to strike, sure and swift. With him, I strike. With me, you; if you are wise now and patient a little longer."

"Bouchard!" repeated Sir Harry, musing. "Bouchard coming. H'm!" Then he laughed and snapped his fingers gaily. "I have stood alongside Hypolite Bouchard before now. Frenchy and frog-eater that he is, he's a bully-boy to sail with. Coming, you say? Not here, but coming? When, man? How soon—and from what port?"

"From the Hawaiian Islands. When?" His elaborate shrug belied the hot eagerness in his own eyes.

Obviously he was one who, though he might counsel patience to another, had little enough of any such quality in his own fiery heart. "If one but knew, señor! Soon; 'tis all I know."

Sir Harry fell again to eyeing him suspiciously. Before now he had known vague promises made for the future in order to smooth the lifting bristles of a threatening present.

"If you are the proper man for your task," ran on Don Nicolas in high insolence. "if you have learned the trick of the strong hand from your late chief, the Captain Cavalier whom I regret, then you will know the way to make your hungry dogs heel to your bidding. If you are not that man, well, then you go down soon before your own pack, and from them I'll pick me another to stand as leader to them; one who can drive the rest as a *vaquero* drives his cattle; one who, to earn his captain's share of the promised loot and pillage, can hold his own avarice in check a few hours."

Very clearly this overbearing hidalgo held the whip hand. He could shoot his impatient friend, Sir Harry, dead before the other, were he spurred to rashness by rage, could lay a hand on the bridle. Or he could shoot, miss entirely, and still be off at a gallop to save his own hide. So Sir Harry Hawk, scratching a bare heel with a bare toe, smiled as though at some pleasant jest.

"When you say 'Bouchard' to me, your speech is golden, señor. I am minded to wait a little longer. But meantime, since you promise his early coming, it is high time that you carried out certain other promises. High time that we be arming. We have, down in the cove, a half-dozen flintlocks and never a charge of powder and ball. We have a dozen men with no boots

to walk in, come the order to march and attack. Munitions and clothing; we are useless without them, señor."

"I gather what I may, with little enough in all California, even at the *presidios*," grumbled Don Nicolas. "As for shoes and clothes, you must make your own."

"No doubt we are to take a bit of blue cloth from the ocean there," jeered Sir Harry, "stitching it with gold thread drawn from the sunset!"

"During this very night," continued Don Nicolas imperturbably, "there will arrive at your encampment some Indians bearing what I have provided for you. Some few scraps of the coarse woollen cloth woven at the mission; two bales of dressed hides; some dried beef, and a keg of red wine."

"Bravo! Surely, surely at last the gates of paradise begin to swing ajar!"

"You, Señor Hawk, will meet these Indians alone, at some safe distance from your men. My messengers are animals of little imagination; they can bear scant tales when they have seen little. Caution—for your own sake—remains the highest virtue," he concluded dryly.

"'Tis clear that you ever have my interest at heart," said Sir Harry, as dry of speech. "And the powder and ball? And extra weapons?"

"You will see that in that matter, too, I have kept my word. As best as circumstances allow. The munitions are consigned to you in person; not to your men. Give them a free hand with loaded guns and they will make such extravagant war on deer and birds as to proclaim to all the province that already the Insurgents are here."

"Trust me," said Sir Harry.

"As far as I must," said Don Nicolas.

"And I shall see you again soon?"

"To-morrow I return to Monterey. His Excellency, Don Pablo Sola, relies on me to bring him certain information there."

Always when he mentioned Don Pablo, the governor of Spanish California, Don Nicolas must pause to emphasize a sneer. Now Sir Harry chuckled.

"You and your Don Pablo Sola!" he laughed. "What a sweet pair of friends you are!"

"He is a bigoted fool," snapped Don Nicolas. "He thinks that the king of Spain hears all that he does here; that the king will reward him; that the king will always sustain him with majestic arms! *Demonio*! He is the great dolt of the ages."

"Doubtless! Since he trusts to his friend Don Nicolas Vara to perform for him important errands!"

"When Monterey falls, I put this Pablo Sola into your hands."

"A matter of ransom?" Sir Harry brightened.

"Nothing else, señor. High ransom."

"And, of course, Bouchard will look on and smile approval when it is Sir Harry Hawk and not himself who swallows this plump morsel?"

"Bouchard is promised other rewards. Besides, it is I who am to be the one true dictator of what is done or not done," exclaimed Don Nicolas with heat. "Such are my plans and for my own reasons."

Sir Harry put tall mockery into his salute.

"Don Nicolas Vara, dictator of California!" he cried. *"Viva!"*

CHAPTER III

"HIST!" commanded Sir Harry, his pigtail flung forward as he jerked his head about, cocking his ear against a sudden sound. "Some one coming. Up from the south. On horses, several of them."

Don Nicolas Vara, too, grew alert and attentive, holding his horse in with a tight rein, leaning forward a bit in the saddle as though he were poised for instant fleet departure. When Sir Harry Hawk's was an expression of predatory interest, the other's was purely of perplexity.

"Who will it be?" demanded Sir Harry. "Some of the fine folks of the *hacienda* down in the hills?"

"No. I've told you already they're all away, visiting down at Santa Barbara. I don't know——"

Here all of a sudden came the priestly garbed Nosegay, running and panting, stumbling over a log, bringing up with a jerk and a grunt, to announce excitedly:

"Four or five on horseback, Cap'n. I couldn't make 'em out any too well, but—when they rode along a clear high place where the sun hit among 'em, I saw something wink and twinkle brighter than just an iron buckle! A jewel in some sleek don's hatband, Cap'n Harry? A diamond in a fancy hilt?"

He began licking his fat lips.

Sir Harry's little blue eyes began to glitter.

"Call up the boys, Nosegay," he commanded sharply. And as Nosegay jolted puffing along his way upon the

most willing of errands, his commander muttered with satisfaction: "Here, with luck, is something to take their minds off their hides and bellies."

"You fool," cried Don Nicolas, but this time was cut short with an angry defiance.

"Hark ye now, my Spanish don!" said Sir Harry, bristling. "After Monterey is looted and I've pulled my boys off, to up-sail and away, California is all yours. But, my fine Spaniard friend, just now we divide her between us. A bit of spice is what my dogs want to season their dry mouthfuls with. Will you lend a hand at a little diversion? Or had you rather sit back and watch the fun?"

Don Nicolas cursed, then sighed, and finally muttered bitterly:

"Neither, I think. After all, whoever these travellers may be, they are no friends of mine. So, with your leave, I'll be on my way before they arrive——"

"Not over-proud of being seen with my pretty men?" jeered Sir Harry.

"With reason," growled Don Nicolas. "Oh, if you had but an ounce of patience sprinkled over the hot sauce of your brigandage! Bah.—Well, a last word, Captain. If you are set on striking, strike hard! My advice to you is to take all precautions lest a few rough-handled stragglers escape to set all California ringing with tidings of your presence."

From down the steep slope whither Nosegay had hastened came a long, shrill whistle. Again; a third time. An answering shout from about the bonfire in the cove, several voices barely heard here above the boom of the surf. In another moment there would be the rush and scramble upward of the score of bare-

footed, ragged castaways in the right mood, if ever men were, for any vicious blow to be struck.

Don Nicolas was of a cautious mind to be anywhere but here. He clapped spurs to his horse's sides and was off at a headlong gallop, diving into the woods, avoiding both the vagabonds surging up from the beach and the little band of horsemen coming along the trail from the south.

"If you've two grains of sense in your hot head," had been his last words as he fled, "you'll leave none to spread tales of what you do."

"Go teach the fish in the ocean how to swim, you popinjay!" screamed Sir Harry after him.

But as one by one, all uplifted into keen expectation by Nosegay's signallings and his brief words as they came abreast of him, the residue of the *Lass o' London's* motley crew came up from the cliffs, he set to work in business-like style placing them in ambuscade. Kanaka George, his cutlass ready, crouched in the shadow of a great boulder on one side of the trail which the oncoming riders must follow, while on the other side, not ten feet from the Kanaka, hidden by the bole of a big redwood, Sarong, the Island Chinaman, squatted with his two duelling pistols. At another spot the boy, Shark's Tooth, slipped into a tangle of brush, hiding as stealthily as a snake, with the Irishman Paddy obliterating himself in the shadows opposite him. Thus, in stealthy pairs did Sir Harry distribute them along the winding trail, so that those who came must ride the gauntlet of them.

"No fuss, no noise," he cautioned emphatically. "There'll not be over six or eight horses, and there'll be anyhow two of you to every pair of reins. Jump

quick and we'll take them all of a heap. And no killing, I tell you, until we see what we've bagged! If we're in luck, there'll be ransom out of this."

They dropped silently into their places, Sir Harry Hawk of them all remaining a moment unhidden while he coolly took this moment to make sure that all was planned aright. Then he, too, slipped behind a tree, vanishing. The uplands were very still, engulfed in a deep sinister silence. The woods seemed empty. The hush of sunset lay over the wilderness, only the roll and boom of the ocean making its eternal growling protest against the quiet of its shores.

The shuffle of hoofbeats, growing slowly more distinct; a spark yonder through the thickening dusk where a shod hoof struck flinty rock. The mellow jingle of bridle chains—a peculiarly musical jingle; there would be rich silver Spanish bits. And the accompanying soft music of the riders' spurs, silver spurs. And then, very vague against the dark wood, a line of figures in single file, proceeding slowly. The horses were tired; it had been a long ride that was to end in this bristling cul-de-sac. The mounted figures drooped. Sir Harry chuckled and thumbed his knife. Never a thing so simple as this. And that fool, Nicolas Vara, wishing everything for himself, would have denied them this bit of fun and snatch at fine feathers! For the newly self-created captain of buccaneers there'd be a fine warm suit of Spanish clothes, if nothing better. Sir Harry, working his muscles like a cat that lies gathering itself for its pounce, took a bit of pleasure from the chill of the November evening, thinking how in another hour he meant to be clad.

The obscurity was not such as to hide the most

salient of details. One could count: there were six horsemen in all. The one who rode at the fore was an old man; a wide black hat hid the head and face, but the great square beard, as white as snow, caught what little light there was. A man of no great height, yet of powerful build, broad and with amazingly wide shoulders. Behind him a slighter figure lost among the voluminous folds of a loose cloak. Next, also cloaked, a figure that might have been anything, so huddled forward, vaguely suggestive of dispirited lack of all concern. The three others, sitting straight in their saddles, each with a musket across his lap, presented the only hint at preparedness for what was so soon to occur.

"Indians, for a guard," grunted Sir Harry to himself, accurate in his surmise. "Some rich *ranchero* and——"

Now, more than before, did he screw down into place: Sir Harry Cat, a name to suit him now. For one of the riders had spoken, the second in the tiny cavalcade, that slender rider just behind the old man. Far more musical, even in Sir Harry's tight little ears, than the jingle of silver chains was this voice; touched with weariness, chiming with a hint of petulance, it was yet as sweet and clear as a bell, the voice of one of those Californian *señoritas* toward which Sir Harry's fancies had sped aforetime.

"Have you taken the wrong way somewhere, Great Picton?" she complained. "Oh, but this ride is endless."

"Now!" cried Sir Harry, and sprang to his feet.

In an instant, and for scarcely longer than that initial instant, all was scuffle, turmoil, and uproar. The

horses snorted, reared, and began a wild threshing as two men leaped up from the shadows and flung themselves at each of the bits. Three men to every beast, with Sir Harry looking on, ready to lend a hand at any point.

From the old man in the lead, him whom the girl had addressed as Great Picton, came a rumbling, bellowing roar. What leathern lungs that old fellow had in that deep chest of his! And what rage was unleashed when he saw what was afoot! He snatched at his sword, the longest, heaviest blade that ever came from far Spain into California. But he had all too little warning, there was such a whirlwind rush from idle abstraction of one moment to overwhelming attack the next. The grinning boy necklaced with shark's teeth was hanging to his reins; the huge Kanaka was dragging at him; the Chinaman, Sarong, had him by wrist and throat: Picton, struggling and rumbling like a lion in the toils, came down heavily.

As matters went with him, so, in general, did they go behind him with his following, and for the most part with readier ease. A shrill scream burst out, pulsing with terror; another scream. Sir Harry gloated afresh. In a party of six to have the luck of two little white mice! Their saddles stood empty as they were dragged down; their screams ended short off as willing hands were clapped over their mouths.

One shot only was fired, a gun discharged in the struggle with one of the Indians. The fellow came down under the feet of his assailants, snatching at his knife. It was kicked from his hand; he wriggled to his feet and started to run. A dark form was upon him, the two struggling together. The parrot voice of the

ill-humored Irishman cried out in pain; then again in vicious rage. With his second shout came the sound of his blow as he revenged himself for a battered face by driving a knife inches deep into a body which stiffened and then relaxed.

The thing was done, ve-ry prettily done, as Sir Harry was the first to concede. Six fine horses taken, five captives to consider, one Indian knifed, and not a man of his crew more than superficially scratched.

"Down to the cove with them, gentlemen!" he commanded brightly. "We'll have a chat with them by the light of the fire. You, Nosegay, and you, Toothy, tie the horses hard and fast against some present need we'll no doubt have for them. You, Paddy of Cork, as long as you've stuck your man, make sure of him; there's to be none crawling off telling yarns."

Then he whirled, and light and agile of foot as light of heart, he led the way down the steep path, Paddy alone remaining behind for a moment. Kanaka George was laughing, his laughter ever of an ominous order, and never more so than now that he gathered up into his arms a slender form that had suddenly gone limp.

"Prize of war!" he grinned. "Mine!"

Sir Harry hung on his heel, glared, then made a little clicking noise with his teeth, and led on again. If sooner or later he was to slit the nigger's throat, why not to-night?

"These Indians, they're no good to us," called a voice from the rear, the voice of Paddy. "Might as well——"

Again Sir Harry spun on his heel.

"You'll keep in mind orders is orders, Cork-head!" he spat out, fouling his admonitions with shrill curses.

"Hold your tongue and 'mind yourself who's captain here!"

The second of the two women began screaming again as she was plucked along with a hand dragging her by each wrist. Then she, too, appeared to wilt as her outcries were smothered. The old man, Picton, with white head uncovered, square white beard bristling, stalked along like a clumsy machine between Sarong and another clinging to his thick old arms. A little moan from the inert figure in Kanaka George's arms barely reached his ears. Yet it seemed to galvanize him. He was unarmed, for they had his sword; he was old, having battled life a full eighty years. Yet he was an old war-horse ever, and never more than now did wrath and the lust for murderous onslaught consume him.

It was the spirit, as young within him now as two score years ago, which made the man terrible. He jerked in his two great hairy fists close to his chest, dragging closer his two captors; with all his might he flung out his arms again, shoving away from him those who clung to him. Thus he freed one hand. Then Picton struck. Time was when men had gathered to watch him drop an ox with that fist. The blow caught the Chinaman full in the face, lifted him and hurled him backwards, spinning, tumbling, plunging headlong down the steep slope.

And now, in full cry, bellowing like a bull, old Picton charged at the man just in front of him, the fellow carrying Picton's long sword. It was a moment all of confusion; trees stood all about them, and it was more dark than light. Sarong, rolling over and scrambling to his legs, made the air reek with the filth of his oaths

and through his curses stabbed the parroty laugh of Paddy, never a well-wisher of the yellow man.

Picton's own sword, for which he groped so wildly, was swung high above his head, menacing him with sudden destruction. Sir Harry Hawk, skipping in his excitement, screamed:

"Don't kill him! Don't kill him! A fat ransom, you fools——"

But the man wielding the sword would have killed, and grunted his relief thereafter, let orders to the contrary fly as thick as raindrops, having a fancy to keep his own skin whole. Yet now the very inordinate length of the blade itself saved old Picton. Lifted high for the blow it struck overhead among a tangle of branches, twisted sidewise and was deflected just enough to miss its mark altogether.

And now old Picton was upon him! The sword fell from tingling fingers. Picton groped, cut his knuckles against the keen edge, found the hilt and gave voice to his deep mellow roar of triumph.

But before he could spin about to face them, here came the Kanaka, his body catapulted through the air like that of a hawk striking. He caught Picton full in the middle and the two went down. On top of them, still shouting his orders, leaped Sir Harry Hawk. Two others gave a hand; in another instant there were a full half-dozen of them grappling and striking at the short massive body underneath. Then Sir Harry extricated himself from the mass, Picton's sword now in his own hands, shouting to them to move on again. But the old man lay where he had fallen.

"Stuck him in the dark, one of you dogs, have you?" said Sir Harry, become all of a sudden soft spoken, and

therefore the more dangerous. "Rob me of my prize money, eh? Now, that's an unlucky thing for the man as did it! Step up, whoever you are, and speak up. Was it you, Kanaka? Or you, Dick? Whoever you are, I'm going to slit you from neck to navel!"

But Picton, despite the pummelling he had received, was little hurt and bore never a knife wound. When they got him to his feet, four men holding him, all they could hear was his deep sob and then his rough voice, weeping!

"Oh, señorita! I have failed you, I, Picton. A handful of dogs, and I have let them put their dirty hands on you!"

Sir Harry, all gayety again, began to laugh.

"Come along, my gentlemen! Down to the cove and the fire and we'll have a look at our gleanings."

His bubbling spirits met ready response. They trudged downward bantering and guffawing, rallying the Chinaman, who had saved himself by a lucky catch at a bush from a sheer drop down the cliffs, jeering at the Kanaka for letting an old white-whiskers make a monkey of him, bandying back and forth. And so, after a few minutes, to their fire among the big black rocks of the white beach.

Now was Sir Harry Hawk's hour. Give these fellows of his something to do, a bit of spice like to-night's, and he knew the trick of holding them to heel. It was only when they were put to endure the tedium of the doldrums that they were a handful for any man. What they needed was activity. Given that and a dash of fun, they were a simple, good-humored lot, very pleasant company indeed, and easy to get along with.

Sir Harry stood on a low flat rock near the fire,

leaning on Picton's sword. Standing here he was granted that which he was ever resentfully conscious of lacking, an appearance of greater stature. Also from here he could more easily see over the heads of the tallest fellows. Finally, as leader, it was the thing ever to set himself apart and over them. The rest were soon in a tight-packed curious ring about their prisoners.

Sir Harry might have been a tolerant schoolmaster watching his wild youngsters come flocking into the classroom full of the rich ardor of their outdoor play, allowing them now a bit of noisy turbulence before setting them in order at their desks. Beaming upon them he watched them snatch and finger. Cloaks were torn from their captives' shoulders and flung with an air about their own; a scarlet lining brushed a pair of grimy naked shoulders. Picton's great black hat was stuck upon a towselled head, and the one who wore it was busy rifling its owner's pockets. A few silver coins were chinked gleefully; there was a rush and a scramble, coins fallen into the loose sand, the inevitable stream of oaths, and a blow struck.

For the most part interest centred about the two women. It had been many and many a day since anything even remotely feminine had come among them. They pawed, not ungently for such, at gown and hair. They stood so that the firelight might reveal the features of their prisoners, piling on dry fuel recklessly. Then a mighty shout went up.

One was a woman of middle age, stout, dark, and with more than a hint of Indian blood, gibbering now hysterically. Had she been the only one of her sex, sight of her might have gladdened their starved eyes.

But there was the other. Before her, once she was dragged forward to the revealing light, they had first stood mute a minute, staring, jaws dropping. Then came their shout.

Though terror whitened her face it dimmed nothing of her rare loveliness. It served rather but to enlarge her great starry eyes. Though these men had fared into many a port up and down the world they had never seen anything like her. Among them, in these harsh surroundings, she looked little and delicate and fragile, some rare tender little flower. From her ears, from under the profuse masses of soft disarrayed hair, hung pearl pendants, glowing tremulously in the fitful fire gleam; about the white purity of her throat pearls of price, shining softly with their virginal fires. Yet, ringed about as she was by covetous eyes, the richest of pearls were ignored first for her own rarer richness. Here, without doubt, was the one for whom the old man had wept; here was one whom in all her little life until now no rude hand had ever touched.

"Gentlemen!" cried Sir Harry now. "Easy does it. Not a scratch upon that fair skin! Not a bruise or a blemish. 'Tis an earnest of what in a few days Monterey will give us without stint. The very flower of the land, my bully boys. Ve-ry nice!"

She stared about her, her hands clasped tight. Then she closed her eyes and shuddered. But now not even a moan came from her. She was beyond that.

They had run a piece of rope about and about old Picton's body, binding his arms to his sides. He stood gnawing at his under-lip, his eyes red. Anger, shame, and a deep, deep sorrow gave him such a look that his face caught and held Sir Harry's wandering eye and caused a sudden jeering:

"Oho! Look at our old baby yonder; he's about to cry again! Bring him forward; the females will find their tongues later, but just now they're useless to the man who would be informed. You, Señor Ranchero," as Picton was thrust closer, "who the devil are you anyway? Can't you see we're all afire with curiosity?"

"Me?" said Picton dully, never a man of the sharpest wits and now almost stupid with despair. "Me, I'm Picton."

"Picton, eh? Picton What, from Where?"

"*Por Dios!*" swore poor old Picton, straining at his bonds, what of his face was not hidden by his beard growing violent red. "Ha!"

Sir Harry laughed and leaned forward to prick him with the long blade.

"Answer up, old bear. Full name and titles for my gentlemen."

"Ho!" cried Picton. And then, glaring wrathfully at the threatening sword point, "I'm Picton, I tell you. Pedro Pablo Pilar Picton, an honest man, 'fore God, and one that would hang you to the first tree."

"Master of what broad acres?" demanded Sir Harry, always mindful of ransom. "Of how many thousands of fat cattle and sleek horses?"

Picton gaped at him. Then grunted disgustedly.

"Master of nothing," he growled, "but a pretty wish to get my hands on you. Majordomo, rather, to Don Julian de la Fuente of the *rancho* over yonder by the mission."

"*Majordomo!*" called Paddy. "Wasn't it a bird calling himself a majordomo I knew down in Argentine? Rich as grease, he was, pilfering from his master."

"Ay, ay," amended Sir Harry. "And now, Don Picton, who's this wench here? One of the fancy, eh? Do you have princesses here in this California of yours? A princess then, I'll be bound."

Inflated until it seemed they must burst, Picton's lungs swelled slowly; then came his windy sigh like a gush of air from a leaky bellows.

"Have a care how you even look at her," he growled, deep in his throat. "God would strike any man dead——"

One near her leaned forward leering, brushing his fingers across her throat, setting her ear-rings shaking. She quivered and turned eyes full of agony upon Picton. He began again tearing at his bonds like a madman.

"Soho; gentle does it always," crooned Sir Harry. "Come, Señor Majordomo, and spin us the yarn. Who is the little kitten?"

"She is one," fumed Picton, "for whom every sword in California would jump out of its scabbard! Like a princess? *Puf!* Like twenty princesses. She is the granddaughter of that same Don Julian who, when he hears of this, will rend you asunder like an old rag."

"Ve-ry good," chuckled Sir Harry, sure now of his ransom. "This other female? Not so much?"

"My own daughter," said Picton heavily, "whom I'd rather see dead at my foot than in your hands. She accompanies the Señorita Virginia Luisa as *duenna*——"

"God save the proprieties!" and there was high approving laughter at Sir Harry's mock reverence.

"Now here's the case: One thousand fine Spanish doubloons for the little princess, returned when you say the word, to her loving grandfather—and no charge made for any hug and squeeze she may get while in our worshipful midst! Five hundred doubloons for this Majordomo Picton—which amount we'll trust resides in his own coffers, pilfered from his master. One hundred doubloons for his fat-faced daughter—and may she ever tell the tale that gallant gentlemen valued her so high. Of the two Indians who are left us, one rides in the morning with this word. The other they shall pay ten gold pieces for or we'll slit his gullet for him and raise no argument."

Hope began to battle upward in old Picton's laboring breast. Hope sent its first bright rays into the girl's starry eyes. But, in both cases surrounded by those predatory, merciless devils, hope was a little faint flutter, flaring up, drowned in sick despair.

"So much for to-morrow. For to-night there remain certain trinkets well worth division. After that, will not the little princess smile on us? Tears are not so pretty as pearls and sighs never tickle the ears like a bit of song and a snatch of laughter."

A dozen men sprang forward, jostling, elbowing, beginning to strike at one another. In the centre of the rush, half fainting, the little figure was borne this way and that. A hasty hand broke the tiny chain with its pearls about her neck. They tore off her cloak; its soft blue silken lining soon brushed a pair of brawny naked shoulders. They plucked at her sash, satin, scarlet. Fingering, picking, fighting among themselves, they were like dogs tumbling about their quarry.

Hands were even being raised to tear away her ear-

drops, delicate little things swinging from tiny piercings in the hidden lobes.

"Don't! Don't!" she screamed above the raucous babel of their savage voices. "Here; I'll give them to you."

She lifted her own swift-flying fingers to her own ears, in the wildest haste to detach the baubles. Sir Harry looked and bespoke his approval.

"Gently, my gentlemen," he called. "Not a bruise, I tell you, on that soft white skin. 'Ware rudeness, my bully boys! 'Tis a lady we have to do with, one very sweet and dear."

Here was one of Sir Harry's great moments. Never more light of heart, never more mercilessly cruel, he stood leaning on the hilt of Picton's great sword, grinning with rare good humor. Truly he knew the hearts of these wild devils of his; idleness alone got them into mischief. Give them, as now, congenial activity, and he'd have them frisking about him as sweet-tempered as so many lambkins.

Very intent were they all in what was afoot, equally intent the complacent Sir Harry watching them. Thus it was not strange that no man of them all had eyes for what might stand hidden among the black rocks and their black shadows just without the flickering ring of the fire's brightness. Thus no man of them all had seen a figure which for some moments had stood on the top of one of the biggest of the boulders, in a position to mark everything that happened. Nor had any seen when the figure slipped quietly down from its place to come swiftly yet silently across the narrow stretch of intervening beach.

Sir Harry started at feeling a hand close down firmly over his own on the sword hilt. He turned wonderingly, his grin still pleasantly moulding his features.

But now, never did a man's smile flee swifter from mouth and eyes together. In its place started up a look of consternation, of downright stark terror. Sir Harry's mouth dropped wide open; his eyes stared wildly; in the first shock his hand jerked away from that hand which had sought his, abandoning the sword hilt as though it were a coal of fire. His was the expression of a man who sees one risen from the dead.

First of all there by the fire to see was the girl whom Picton had named Señorita Virginia Luisa. At this moment of the greatest terror of her life she had turned to beg mercy of the little man on the flat rock, him who was in command here. Now she saw that little man suddenly seeming to shrink and cower; she heard him stammering strangely; she saw the figure at his side. And again sudden wild hope leaped up high in her heart.

"Oh, Señor! Señor!" she pleaded, lifting her clasped hands to this newcomer. "Save me!"

In the bright red fire-glow she saw a young man who might have had an angel for his mother, but Satan himself for sire. She saw the great black hat with a plume in it pushed far back at an angle of rare and impertinent jauntiness; she saw the cascade of tawny curling hair and a pair of bright, laughing eyes. There was elegance about him, in the gay-lined loose cloak that he wore, in buckles and torn lace and tall boots; in the pistols stuck in his sash and, most of all, in the insolent recklessness of his bearing. Bold to over-boldness

were those eyes he turned full upon her own; he fascinated, he bred fresh hope—he instilled new fears.

"You—you come back from the dead!" Sir Harry was gasping, making but a harsh, almost inaudible whisper of his words.

And now the others saw. From a noisy jostling crowd, as if some magic fell upon them, they grew stock still, staring as Sir Harry stared, jaws dropped down. A great silence, an unbroken hush save only for the sounding sea booming in his caverns, usurped the reign of recent clamor.

She saw only him who had stepped to a place where he towered over Sir Harry Hawk. He appeared to see only her. Across the few paces separating them her eyes pleaded, begged in agony. His own laughed. It was then that he had the look of one sired by Satan.

Yet, even while he laughed, a subtle change entered his look. He was studying her intently, his eyes hard upon hers as though bent on violating the very sanctuary of her soul to drag forth a true understanding of whatever mysteries resided in the secret places of her being. And now, so earnest was he, a black frown gathered his brow and darkened his eyes, his searching regard as ruthless as a hand that tears veilings aside in quest of what lies hidden. Then, the second time his expression altered, to pay her rare beauty such bold tribute as she had never guessed a man's eyes could hold. He swept off his hat, brushing his boots with the plume; he straightened, holding her look with that new look of his—and for the first time her pallor fled, and she went red, a hot, burning red, while her heart raced.

Silence had held, time had stood still for them. But, with the shock of his sudden appearance passed,

the hush of wonder was drowned in a fresh uproar. Men who had held their breaths began shouting.

"Back from the grave!" yelled one. "It's old Kill-devil himself!"

"It's Storm-along! . . . Big Boy! . . . Kill-devil!" they roared.

He had spoken not so much as a single word. Now, hat in hand, he sprang down from the rock, made his way thrusting them off to right and left, and coming straight to that little prisoner who had so long held his look, lifted her cold hand to his lips, bowing deeply, as in a gay untroubled voice he said lightly:

"Your most humble servant, Madam. These pretty fellows, as you hear, playfully give me many names. But, to you, plain Captain Cavalier—and very much at your service."

CHAPTER IV

STILL holding the lady's hand, which he seemed not in the slightest haste to relinguish, leaning upon Picton's tall sword as on a cane held gracefully, his plumed hat under his arm, Captain Cavalier turned to toss his light words to the motley which, beginning to gape anew, regarded him uncertainly.

"I'd have a little chat with the captive maiden," he announced gaily, as though launched on a lark which promised infinite amusement. "A bit of privacy for us, an it please you."

He lifted her hand, holding it high; thus they were like two graceful figures about to take the first step in the minuet.

He made them gasp. It was a way he had, as impertinent, as cool, as carelessly insulting as any *preux chevalier* inviting envy and hatred from vassalage.

But he was too keenly aware of their minds ever, and of their mood now, not to be expectant of some degree of truculence. To have their very fingers upon so choice a bit of spoils, then to be bid: "Stand aside; my own fancies are touched!" made for too lively a dissatisfaction to be ignored by one who knew them.

Hardest of all was Sir Harry Hawk hit. He fell to frowning as black as a thunder cloud; he could not get enough of fingering at his knife. A moment ago it was Captain Sir Harry Hawk, and for any slow in deference a blow between the eyes or a knife between the

shoulders. And now it was, from one he had been pleased to think dead, "Stand aside for your master, you dogs."

Fairly quivering with rage stood little Sir Harry, yet his cunning did not desert him; before another lifted a voice it must be he who snatched this opportunity to make himself their spokesman.

"We held you dead, Cavalier," he bugled angrily. "And so——"

"*Captain* Cavalier, you gallows-chick!" cried the other. Yet his words came laughingly, such was the exhilaration in the man's mercuric spirit. "Mind your manners, my pretty little man; there's a lady here!"

"I mind the law of gentlemen of adventure!" cried Sir Harry sharply. "With a captain gone, they elect another. When you deserted ship, so to speak——"

"Deserted ship! You're a dirty liar, Harry Hawk, and ever were! It was you lubbers that lost me my ship, piling overboard like rats when she struck. Had I had a handful of you to stick with me, I'd have saved her. As it was I was the last man to leave her, and came off with food, clothes, and dry powder! And look at you. Rats!" His taunting laughter pricked Sir Harry's vanity far more than any hot curse could have done. "A mongrel band of beggars in filthy rags, that's what you are; what you ever were and would be saving for that same Cavalier, whom you'll name Captain when you address him!"

Sir Harry Hawk had as little fear of physical danger as any man who has an astute brain to counsel him. It had been superstitious dread, in a day when superstition chilled fearless hearts, which had shocked him

into an ague of dismay and had caused him to relinquish Picton's sword. But of greater moment than his proven courage he himself counted his craft and shrewdness. He cut his eyes sidewise at the knot of men grouped on the far side of the fire. He, better than Captain Cavalier or than even themselves, knew what these weeks of hardship, hunger, and enforced inactivity had wrought within them. A devil's lot, restive and disgruntled. High-handed Captain Cavalier always was, giving promise now of the very apex of high-handedness. Pluck the very meat out of these hungry fellows' jaws, would he?

"You've heard me?" cried Captain Cavalier again. "A little privacy, an it please you!"

"Ve-ry nice," responded Sir Harry, all smiles. "By your leave we'll step aside for a moment's conference!"

Nor did he have to force that smile; here was a situation made to his hand, with none other than the mad Cavalier doing the making. Thus did Sir Harry choose to make common cause with his men; and thus, unless Captain Cavalier moderated his way, which Sir Harry knew him better than to fear from him, there'd soon be another sort of dance here on the beach. With a score of the dull-wits at his back, whipped into place by the sting and lash of his own envenomed tongue, there'd be an end of Cavalier once and for all.

So it was Sir Harry, set on leadership and a bit of private vengeance, who led them apart some two score paces, a grumbling lot whose angry voices ceased to reach them only when drowned by the mutter of the sea. The girl, her fingers caught in the firmest grip which had ever detained them, looked fearfully up into the debonair young face now again bent solely upon her

own. So wildly did her heart beat, and so did she tremble, she could scarcely find power to speak.

"Oh, señor!" she whispered. "You will save me?"

"From those hang-dogs?" He lifted her hand to his lips. "Have no fear of them, lady. And, having saved you from being sullied at their vile hands, I win your gratitude . . . such a great deep gratitude as bears one along like a strong tide of ocean——"

"Señor! Oh, God will bless you. Such thankfulness as no one ever felt before——"

But she broke off, tugging at the hand which held her, trying to break free from him. His eyes were dancing, but terrified her more than stern sober eyes would have done.

"God strike me dead," he told her gallantly, "if ever in all my life I once looked into such a pair of eyes! You little beauty—you maddening little beauty! I'd lose my ship ten times over to swim ashore to such a land as holds you."

"You will be good to me! You will be merciful."

"I save you from unspeakable evil in saving you from these unappreciative beasts." He laughed softly at her. "I claim your gratitude, already promised so eloquently, and I win you for my own!"

"But you will not be cowardly. You will not be base. I see it in your eyes."

But what she really saw there made her last words falter. Her voice broke. Despair again paralyzed her.

"Look in my eyes, then; look deep, look true! What do you see there, most sweet lady? You see the very unhidden soul of Captain Cavalier. He does not mask his thought; he does not hide his intent. Look deep, and see to the very bottom of those clear depths!"

He spoke but the truth when he said that here was a man who did not care to masquerade. He was a laughing devil. There was good in him and there was evil. There were reckless generosity, careering boldness, an ability to die as he lived, laughingly; and there was wild lawlessness. He could be stanch to a friend —if ever once he gave his friendship! A man like this was more like to tread his own path alone.

He let you read him, as he had boasted, to the bottom of those depths which he held clear! You saw here a man full of sentiment and villainy. Villainy certainly, if it be the part of a villain to join in bloody raids, robbery, and relentless confiscations in order to enrich his own purse; to take with a rash hand what golden apples of fortune thickened the groves of the world through which he went roistering; to make right of might, and make sure that he was the mightiest; to let out his sword for hire, asking first the price before he thought to ascertain the cause. For such, at a time when the earth seethed with rebellion, sedition, and treasonous plottings, it was as though he and the time were made for each other; for such, in the beginning, it was simple and natural to declare in his heart war against all Spain. After that, placing himself where the richest of Spanish dominions lay athwart his wide path, he had but to strike where he chose and with a conscience as clear as glass.

There came a deep muttering from Picton, prayers and curses intermingled. The two Indians, tied hand and foot and thrown, were twisting at their ropes. The girl's *duenna,* Picton's stolid daughter, threw herself at her mistress's feet, weeping, her face in her hands.

"I have given you my name," Captain Cavalier was saying lightly. "I have heard yours: Virginia Luisa! Ah, 'tis a pretty name, one never to be forgot, I warrant you!"

How could he talk thus, with those men just yonder grouped so ominously? She threw them a hasty glance; just a dark mass in the gloom, vaguely outlined against the ocean, an ocean no more tumultuous than the spirits in their stormy breasts. Yet this Cavalier seemed to have forgotten them.

"Do you know, dear lady," he said softly, "seeing you is like coming home!"

She had wrenched her hand free; he had let it go lingeringly, but towered so close over her that she dared not move, so certain was she that a strong arm would bring her back to him, close to him. Her hands began twisting tight together, an outward sign of how the soul within her writhed, agonized.

Picton could not help her now; she heard the old fellow sob, broken-hearted with hopelessness. The two Indians were disarmed and bound; even were they free they would be no help to her. She knew they would never stand up to a score of men like these; they'd take to their nimble heels in a second. What hope on earth for her? None, unless—and, oh, what a fearful *unless* that was!—it lay in this man who had been master here and who still seemed smug in his belief that master he remained!

"Like home, I tell you," he insisted. "Would you know why?"

Those men whose voices now were lost in the thunder of the surf, how long would they tarry there? They would strike; she knew that they would strike. She

had read their wild eyes, had sensed their brutal hearts. Most of all had some sinister emanation starting out from word and glance of him they called Sir Harry Hawk told her how desperate was her need. They would attack in a moment; there would be a rush of feet, a hell of curses; a black, stormy mass of men, with one alone standing against them. And, inevitably that one, be he as strong as ten, as bold as Satan, as resourceful and swift as any man who ever lived, must go down before them, trampled, broken, crushed back to earth. And then? She shuddered.

And yet, while her hands grew bloodless with clenching, she strove with all her might to smile up at him who smiled down at her.

"That—sounds—strange, señor——"

She had heard of the way of wolves. One stricken, the brute's fellows fell on him, rending, devouring. These were not men; worse than wolves. If only the odds were not so overwhelming; if only some few of them stood back to back with Captain Cavalier! Then, while the fight held them for some few minutes, then must she pray God to let her flee in the dark.

"My brave little frightened dove!" he cried, tall admiration touched as he saw her wan tortured smile. "Well, to explain: You see, I am an American. A Virginian, and heretofore in calling myself a Virginian I have never meant aught than that Virginia was the land of my birth. But now," and his mocking bow was sweeping, "meaning neither *from* nor *of* Virginia —but *for* Virginia! Heaven my witness, dove-eyes."

"Ah! If I could but believe, señor! What, then, were not possible?"

How his eyes stabbed at her. How they probed, rent

veils aside, plunged through barriers, ravished her secret thoughts in their innermost sanctuaries. How stern his eyes could grow. Yet how swiftly again alter to his laughter.

"A little white dove that would usurp the cunning of a serpent," he bantered.

"Listen, señor! Oh, señor, be not thus mad and blind!" She caught his arm; she pointed. "They will be upon you in a minute. Brave as you are, what are bravery and strength of one man against a score?"

He stooped closer, his hard hand on hers.

"Afraid for me, little one? Or——"

She steadied her lips; she held them moulded to their pitiful smile. She whispered brokenly:

"I am afraid—of you. But—I am more afraid—of them——"

"By the whole calendar of all the saints," he shouted joyously, "you'll make a fool of me yet! Girl——"

"What will you do? When they rush at you?"

"Faith, I don't know! Those dogs dare to go beyond lip-lifting and snarling with me?" He clapped on his hat, cocking it fiercely to the side; she saw him toss his curls back over his shoulders. Then he began chuckling, madly it seemed to her.

"They are so many! They will stamp you into the earth," she gasped.

"They will not!"

"They will kill you."

"They will not!"

"Are you mad?"

"If I am, 'tis your doing!"

"Oh, señor, you could be so generous——"

"True. Did I not say you could read me? No man ever yet named Captain Cavalier niggard."

"Then let no maid name him so! Be generous to me, señor. Save me!"

"Yet just now you said that I, one against twenty——"

"God gives strength to right——"

"Then, in the end, it would be His doing? Once saved, it would be Him you thanked?"

All the while she was striving so desperately to think clearly. This fate that threatened her could not come to pass! Youth, embodied in her, clung to that, for youth were never youth were it not borne along eternally on the rosy wings of hope-against-hopelessness. There would be some way out for her, simply because this thing could not be. That beast, Sir Harry Hawk, with all his cunning, jealousy and greed, was set upon rending her away from her newest captor. Those others, a Chinaman, a Kanaka, a maimed scarred face among them, were held back this moment by a gossamer thread which would snap the next. Wolves—a wolf to go down—wolves set to worrying wolves—and her slim chance for flight!

Captain Cavalier was watching her with lifted brows and quizzical smile.

"Virginia!" he coaxed. "Come. You're fairly caught."

"Fairly?" she flung at him.

He shrugged at that.

"Why not? 'Tis doubly fair, fair lady, since we have here both love and war!"

She wanted to scream. Tears stormed the flood gates of her eyes. Yet she held them back, sighing only. Then, past even sighing, she suddenly drew

her slim little body erect, her head held proudly, her eyes with a new look in them blazing into his own.

"You are a coward!" she said steadily. "A loathsome coward!"

That startled him, and he, too, stiffened. Then he mocked her, saying:

"What female's game you would play with me, I don't know. Now, all of a sudden you are no longer Miss Sixteen Summers, but become mysterious Miss Femininity. Were I coward, I ask you, would I set myself alone to hold back that riff-raff from you? Bah!"

"Coward," she told him again, her great fear having at last swept her full tilt into fearlessness. For the vitally charged moment she did not dread even him. "Were you not, you would do a great thing!"

"I'd save you from them—and turn you free?"

"And that you don't do that is the sign of your cowardice!"

He fell to frowning, perplexed, yet intrigued.

"What a lack-wit I am become!"

A second time she caught his arm, lifting to him eyes swimming with distress. She willed with all her girl's soul that all beauty which was hers might float out and up to him, enwrapping him; that it might penetrate the outer citadel of the man's animal nature, into the very centre of his true self, that locked and guarded treasure room where every man has whatever God and his better nature have given him for his ideals.

"If it is that you find in me only a trifling plaything, of little worth," she told him in that same quiet, steady voice, "then there is no hope on earth for me. You will fight with those men and to me the end will be the same. At your hands or theirs I shall be broken and

before morning I will be dead. So answer me; is that what you find in me, señor? Is that all?"

"I find you adorable!" he cried, quickened with enthusiasm. "I have told you that. Adorable, desirable. And, by God, I mean to have you for my own! Were there ten times twenty men there——"

"Sh! Let me speak. Oh, there is so little time, señor! Would you like best to crush me, to see me dead before the sun comes up? As I swear to be! Or, if not a coward, would you risk much to have me yours, truly yours? Laughing, not weeping, señor? Dancing with happiness, not lying cold and dead!"

He caught her hand, dragging her close to him.

"Does witchcraft still work its wiles in this California of yours?"

"I named you coward! Shall I take the words back, señor? Will you show me that you are not that, a most loathsome thing? Or are you afraid?"

"Afraid? Of what, witch?"

"To set me free; to beat off those men, and set me free. And then——"

"Ah, and then?"

"To follow after me! To really win me, to make me truly yours! You, California's enemy, to dare invade California for me wherever I may be! You, one man against hundreds! Oh, you let me read your heart just now; you let me read deep. And I saw wickedness, señor; and I saw something else. It was shining like a star. It was nobility! . . . And, if you freed me, and if you were not afraid to come for me, one, not against a score of creatures like those, but against all California, against my own people. . . ."

Sheer mockery rang out in his laughter.

"That star shining in the depths of me, was it then mere vanity? Would you play on me like that, lady? Have me open my hand now for the fool's hope of showing off later on?"

She seemed to droop.

"It may have been vanity. But I thought it nobility."

Seeming to droop, she hid the look in her eyes. Had she lost? As he began to jeer at her with his laughter, she thought that she had. But it was then that she noted for the first time how young he was! And the plea she had made was a plea only for the ears of wild and golden youth. "To follow after me . . . to really win me, to make me truly yours! You, California's enemy . . . you, one man against hundreds."

She looked up at him. She refused to sense evil in him, she forced herself to see alone a certain dashing manliness. She lingered upon that male beauty which in him was as a gift from heaven and hell united. She let him see her eyes. They promised him that, were he reckless enough or mad enough to set her free and come after, here might be the maid to make a man forget the whole world but her. . . .

There was a deep muttering growl. It was as though the sea had split its voice in twain, speaking now with two voices, one rising more and more threateningly above the other.

"They are coming!" she whispered. And then, so softly that he scarcely heard with his ears the hushed words that spoke to something within him: "May God be with you, Captain Cavalier."

CHAPTER V

With a sudden sweep of his arm he lifted her clear of the ring of firelight, bearing her back into a region of tremulous shadows.

"Whatever betide," he told her with the fresh quality of sternness in his voice, "stick close to me! But try to flee in the fracas, if it comes to blows—ah, that's in your mind!—and I swear on my honor to have done with you; to stand back and set the pack loose on you!"

They were close to Picton.

"Tell me, old man," he said swiftly, "can you fight? If I gave you back this little blade of yours?"

"*Por Dios!*" muttered Picton. "But cut me these bonds, young master, and let me have again my own sword in these two hands and I alone will make a pathway through those blackguards like a cannon-ball in a basket of eggs!"

Captain Cavalier laughed softly. A couple of swift strokes and the old man stood free, stamping in impatience, thrusting forth his empty hands.

"By Saint Vulcan, his sweet body!" cried Captain Cavalier, stopping close to look at the man. "What shoulders the fellow has! If you have a heart one-half as stout——"

Picton's enormous hand locked hard about the familiar hilt. His breath expelled itself in a mighty "Woof!" from his vast lungs.

"Now, young master, quick! Run——"

"Run?" snapped the other. "What talk is this? Do

I hand you a sword like that to use as a staff to run with?"

"Only thirty paces!" grumbled Picton. "There, among the big rocks and the dark. Give me my back to a rock there and let them come."

Again did Captain Cavalier laugh, clapping a heavy hand on the massive shoulder.

"Not one backward pace, old warrior! Where you stand, guard this sweet lady for me."

Not backward, away from what threatened; rather full tilt to meet it did Captain Cavalier run. Thus, almost at a bound, did he come again into the brighter ring of firelight and there stopped, confronting those who came on from the farther side of the fire. They wanted him? Well, here he stood where they might see him. He made a picture for them to fill their eyes with. They in tatters, shivering with the night air; he warm and richly clad, debonair and point-device, in an elegance which he ever affected and which, with his present purpose, it suited him well that they mark.

"You are over-hasty in returning unsummoned," he told them lightly. "But in another moment I would have called to you, so let it pass. Now for my message to you: I have parleyed with the maid and I have a mind to claim her for my own!"

Sir Harry Hawk at their head was smiling complacently; as one guessed by what was to be seen of his face in the flickering light, as one knew by his voice when he spoke.

"I make bold to remind you, Cavalier," he said sneeringly, "that we, and not you, made her and the others captive. We, too, have parleyed, and with this decision come to: You have nothing to say on this

matter. Further, we grow weary of these ways of yours. The crew, an it please you, are of a mind to have a new captain."

Captain Cavalier, hands on hips, heard him through and even nodded pleasantly.

"And that would be you? Well, well," he sighed, "times change and bold buccaneers may yet come to the pass where they ask a girl to lead them." Then he began to laugh, such fresh, spontaneous and unaffected laughter as could only have come from one moved to true and uncontrollable mirth. He threw out his hand, pointing. "Look at you, Harry Hawk! How you impose upon the admiring eyesight with those clothes of yours! Half naked, and, on my honor, I'd prefer utter nakedness to such tatters as you clutch about you. But 'tis for modesty, rather than elegance, that you so deck yourself. Oh, ho, ho! what a dashing figure to stand forth as chosen chief to a crew of free-booters!"

Sir Harry's complacency vanished. He grew shrilly vocal. But Captain Cavalier had not yet done. Smothering his laughter, he said carelessly:

"Well, well, let it be. You do your poor best, little man, and I'm in bad taste to find mirth in your misery. To business then. But, let me see: has there not ever been a pretty custom among us? Impelled by that loyalty to your fellows which we all know so well, feeling it your duty to them to displace an unworthy captain in order to give them a very paragon, you come to ask me to cross blades with you? If you insist—most willingly, Harry Hawk."

But Sir Harry Hawk had known all along that some such diversion would doubtless be suggested and had

no wish toward this unnecessary risk. He, too, could whip up a mockery of laughter at his need.

"I would pleasure you," he taunted, "were there not a sweeter draught to be sipped. We grow impatient for deferred joys, an it pleasure you! The maid there——"

Ignoring him, Captain Cavalier called sharply:

"Paddy, you fool from Cork! Are you there?"

"Aye, aye, sir!" muttered Paddy's harsh voice.

"And you, Dick o' Boston, are you there?"

"Aye, aye," piped a voice.

"And you, Willie Weathercock? And you, Gurton? Are you there?"

"Aye, aye," came sullen responses. "And sick o' talk."

"All there? Indeed, I'd thought you four and some others dead, to let this little ship's rat speak for you! Men full grown I thought you, and yet you tolerate that scurvy knave aspire to captaincy over you!" He laughed again scornfully. "I've a notion to turn my back on the fools' squad of you and let you starve first, freeze second, and for third choice go your sweet ways to the gallows."

"Look you," shrilled Sir Harry Hawk, "palaver won't go!"

"You dullards," cried Cavalier. "Look at me and look well!" He struck an attitude for them, such an attitude as no other man among them had the trick of striking. "Look about you at one another, little ones; then look at me! What do you see? Ah, you see me, as ever you did, well clothed, well fed—and you see your little Captain Runt there shivering in rags, his belly pinched with hunger. And now, having looked,

listen! I'll not tell you how I got ashore—yet! But you note that I came off well clad, and what's to the point, well armed and powder-dry! You'd guess I came well provisioned? That perhaps I even took time to bring off with me that which you rats forgot? Aha! But be still; listen again. Can you hear this, and have your ears so forgotten the sound of it that you cannot tell what it is?"

In his cupped hands he set something clinking and jingling. No other music in their ears was ever like the music of gold pieces.

"And now look again! Is the light strong enough for you to see?"

With a sudden careless gesture he tossed up that which he had held. The handful of disks spun in the air, gleamed, darkened and shone again and fell into the heart of the fire.

"At least I might have handed you those doubloons?" he demanded contemptuously. "I tell you I've a notion to see you starved and hanged first or—what's worse —led by that unlucky gallows-chick. Oh, you know what a man he is for luck; look at him else! Well, we've no ship now, thanks to you who followed him fast enough overboard, I'll be bound! We're ashore now, and unless I should choose to get us another ship —which, mind you, I'm of no mood to promise——"

"I told you 'ware the man's talk; he has a tongue like a snake!" cried Sir Harry and snatched at a musket in hands nearby, one taken earlier from Picton's Indian guard. It was time for a musket ball to put a stop to all parley.

What Sir Harry, ready to end matters, did not look for was what happened. With blows to be struck,

Captain Cavalier had ever a great fondness for striking the first. The fire was in his way, but with a shout he went over it, his boots striking brands right and left. Sir Harry whipped up the gun and fired. But like most of the band, he was a far truer hand at steel than at powder and ball, and moreover, a target hurtling through conflicting light and shadow and swirling smoke was far from the best. The discharge, though almost in his attacker's face, did not stop Captain Cavalier and did not save Sir Harry Hawk. Sir Harry dropped the flint-lock, cursing wildly, and snatched at his knife.

Captain Cavalier struck, not with steel, since he had not so much as drawn the rapier at his side, but with his fist. He smote the other square between the little evil blue eyes, such a blow as called up a little grunt of admiration and delight from even Picton, striker of blows. And Sir Harry dropped in his tracks.

"Good, young master!" Picton was muttering, stamping up and down excitedly. "Ah, señorita, that's a man!"

Those of Sir Harry Hawk's following held motionless for an uncertain moment with Captain Cavalier standing over the fallen man, nose to nose with them and glaring fiercely. He had drawn no blood; had that been accident or was it prompted by some devilish cunning of his own? Had there been the flash of steel and the slashing of flesh, they must have been swept along into further slaughter. As it was, with him fairly in their midst, they held for that one moment hesitating.

What a knowledge the man had of men, particularly of these men whom before now and many the time he

had whipped into line! He showed them Captain Cavalier, their old leader, blazing now with anger, sure of himself and with no doubt as to them; he showed them their new leader senseless at their feet. He counted on slow wits, stupefied; on the working of old habit. So for that silent moment he gave them only silence and his face to look at.

Then, as they shifted, suddenly he found voice. Gone utterly was that insouciant, mocking, laughing young cavalier who had taunted them so lightheartedly. In his place was a very devil incarnate, for such blazing rage as they had never guessed lay hidden even in one they had ever feared. His voice roared in their ears, rough with a terrible anger. He raged at them, he reviled them, he named them all the unspeakable epithets in a freebooter's reeking calendar. He gave them such a tongue-lashing as seldom any pack of disgruntled men have stood to listen to. He spewed his disgust, his contempt on them; he named them by name, one after another, until he had named a dozen, until he was out of breath and his voice broke.

Then again he was silent, glaring at them, his face working, his shoulder thrust toward them, his hand at last on his hilt. And they were as silent as he. Only a moment he stood thus. Then he spoke again, briefly now, his voice quiet and hard and cold.

"I'm done with you," he said sternly. "May Hell take you—if Hell itself, disgusted, does not vomit you forth. I am ashamed that I ever named myself captain over you. Go, when I'm gone, and rake in the fire for what I've flung there; the last you'll ever have from me."

What gripped them, what still held them standing

and gaping, was the ringing note in that quiet voice. It was the bell-clear note of a perfect sincerity. He meant what he said. In disgust and in shame, he was done with them.

He turned his back square on them and strode away, going swiftly to the spot in the shadows where Virginia Luisa, scarcely breathing, awaited him; where Picton, all a-quiver like a war charger, was choking over incoherent mutterings.

"Now, young master! *Por Dios!* but you mastered them. Now; quick. They'll be on us——"

There were dregs left in the vials of wrath, to be poured now upon Picton. Virginia Luisa saw, though dimly, Captain Cavalier's face and whipped back from him, terrified.

"Run, then, you great baby!" he stormed. "Scuttle off with that blade of yours, which you'd do well to barter for a wooden one. Give a man room to breathe in. Do you think that I'll be driven to one quick step by that gang of curs? Pah; I am sick of men as I find them! A boy could drive them along with a rotten stick. Yes, and you with them. Go, if you want to go. I've no use for you! Cowards, cowards, cowards! The world's thick with them. I'd rather be dead——"

Old Picton stiffened and gasped; he went a fiery red which the dark hid, but which burned his old leathern cheeks.

"Ho!" he shouted at the top of his old voice. "Name me coward, would you? Link me with those puppies of yours, would you? *Demonio!* Pluck out that little French fencing rapier of yours, my pirate captain, and I'll lay you open like butchered beef!"

As quick as lightning did Captain Cavalier's weapon

flash out from his side. With a scream Virginia Luisa sprang between them.

"Are you mad, you two? Great Picton, we know you for a brave man. Captain Cavalier, he meant only—— Oh, *Virgen santisima!* have mercy!"

Picton, forgetful for the first time in his devoted life of the high respect he ever paid his little mistress, put out a heavy hand to sweep her aside. And as for Captain Cavalier—the man was laughing!

"Come, come," he said lightly. "Hold your great impaling machine, my good Picton. I am afraid that those cheap fellows made me lose that temper of mine. I take my words back. There, be a good fellow; here is my hand on it."

"Well, then," muttered Picton grudgingly. "If you say so. But——"

"You are going to set me free?" breathed the girl tremulously. "You save me from them and from—from——"

"From me? Ah, your wishes scamper, Virginia! Have I said that?"

"You say nothing! But you have shown me you are not afraid of twenty men! You are not then afraid of anything, of any numbers! You will do that other thing I asked of you?"

"Those fellows, young master, are grumbling again," warned Picton. "Why didn't you slit that little trouble-maker's gullet? They'll be on us, I tell you."

Captain Cavalier paid him no heed. The girl's white face was upturned; he was looking intently down into it.

"By heaven!" he grunted once, half savagely, half in sheer wonder at what she let be revealed to him.

"Oh, señor!" she whispered, pleading. "Let it shine out, clear and strong and bright—that star I saw——"

"By heaven!" he cried the second time, and there was light enough for her to see, marvelling, how bright his eyes grew. "I've ever been a fool for mad deeds——"

"Oh, señor! Then—then you are letting me go!"

"To horse, old Picton!" he commanded grimly. "These Indians and that daughter of yours, bring them along."

With a sudden gesture he set both strong hands on Virginia Luisa's shoulders and stared a long while down at her, saying at last and for her ears alone:

"I ride with you, an escort to cut down any man who lifts an eye to you. Aye, though riding with you it were into the very gates——"

She shuddered.

"Not of death, señor! Not that!"

"Will the maid never let me finish?" he demanded.

And then, drawing her a little closer in that relentless grip of his, he whispered close to her hair, laughing the while:

"Before now I've heard death's gates clang and seen Hell's hot door ajar. Has your witchcraft set some new boldness in a heart, mad enough already, God knows? Had you let me finish, it would have been thus: 'I go with you, were it into the very gates—of Paradise'!"

CHAPTER VI

CAPTAIN CAVALIER!" shouted a voice, and from the black mass of figures huddled beyond the fire over the fallen Sir Harry Hawk one broke free and ran a few paces forward. The firelight gleamed bright on the naked length of the upflung cutlass in his hand. "Captain Cavalier for ever!"

"That would be Dick o' Boston," hazarded Captain Cavalier softly; Virginia Luisa at his side saw how his eagle's beak of a nose twitched contemptuously. "Dog by dog they'll be coming to their senses. Come; we go. Lead the way, old Picton. Let your Indians arm themselves as best they can with clubs or sharp stones."

Another voice joined itself to Dick o' Boston's; there were now three or four voices shouting vociferously: "Captain Cavalier for ever!"

"This way, quick," old Picton was ordering. "Once we're on the cliffs and in the dark we'll brush them off like flies if they think to set upon us. You will step close behind me, señorita?"

Captain Cavalier, casting a last glance backward, saw something lift itself from the ground, rise insecurely, take a forward step and then sink down, sitting upon a rock. There would be Sir Harry Hawk, beginning to stir again, yet still uncertain, sick and dizzy.

"There'll be division among 'em as sure as they're lawless dolts," he offered cheerfully. "But their little affair for the moment is none of ours. Never a prettier time to get to horse!"

They made their way hurriedly to the steeply pitching mountain side and began the difficult ascent. Half a dozen men ran some paces after them, shouting; but their shouts were again flattering cries of "Cavalier for ever!" or earnest supplications for further parley. Clearly they were of no one mind now; some cried to Cavalier to come back, some cried to their fellows to hold their tongues and let Cavalier have his way, recalling how his way had ever borne them along in pleasant paths. Sir Harry Hawk got himself to his feet again and began, badly shaken as he was, to take a hand.

Picton swore at every step, losing himself in the dark, slipping, scrambling more than once on all fours. A figure shot by him; there went one of the Indians, leading more swiftly and sure-footedly. Up they went, one at the heels of another, Captain Cavalier bringing up the rear and now and again turning to look back. What he saw down yonder on the beach pleased him; Virginia Luisa, flitting on just ahead of him, heard him chuckle. Despite the panicky fear which had been so long upon her, and from which she was yet by no means free, she paused an instant, asking him:

"What is it?"

"Dick o' Boston sees himself a fool for ever having let that little Harry Hawk make himself leader among them," he laughed. "Now, seeing a nice opportunity, he'll rally what of them he can about him. It did the prestige of our friend Harry no great good to go down under a blow; if we sat patiently up here and liked the sport we might yet watch them fly at one another's throats."

"Let us hurry then, while we can!"

There was a report, a flash down there below, the whine of a musket ball.

"Only an explosion of hatred, sweet lady! 'Tis infernally steep and dark here; your hand——"

But instead she gathered up her skirts and ran on ahead. He groped for her, heard her some steps away and hastened after her.

At the top of the ridge they found the two Indians with the horses; Nosegay had wasted little time leading them to any distance, and none at all in unsaddling; even the bits were in the horses' mouths. The animals, nervous after the attack so short a while ago, and frightened afresh by the Indians dashing upon them, were rearing and threshing about. There was a moment of confusion, ended by Captain Cavalier's curt:

"Come, there's no wild haste, is there? We're as good as mounted already and those fellows, were they minded to be after us, have only their bare feet to ride on."

He took the nearest horse by the bit and began soothing him with gentle hand and crooning voice.

"By your sweet leave, señorita," he said then, and lifted his erstwhile captive into the saddle. At random he caught another pair of reins and swung up beside her. The others were up, the Indians beginning to jabber now for the first time.

"Aye," muttered Picton heavily. "They've killed poor Ignacio and he'll have to lie where he is to-night. But we'll be back for him with daylight, my children." He turned in his saddle and shook his fist toward the beach below. "And for you little fellows! Ho, never fear, old Picton returns to you."

"We ride now, an it please you," said Captain

Cavalier crisply. "Lead the way, old man, or set one of your Indians to do so. In that case you follow him with your other Indian and your daughter." He leaned out from his saddle and caught the reins of the horse near him, concluding lightly, "Your little mistress and I would talk together as we ride."

Talk? How could he expect her to talk when she was near collapse from all she had undergone; danger not yet utterly to be ignored, the vivid memory of all that had occurred sweeping back upon her like blinding flashes of light. She shuddered; just yonder, hidden by dark and bushes, lay dead one of the faithful household servants whom she had known since childhood.

"Now, tell me," said Captain Cavalier, when at last he gave the signal to follow the others. "Just where do we ride to-night?"

"To my papagrande's *rancho,*" she found herself answering. "We were nearly home when—— It is but a few miles through the mountains."

"And just who is this grandfather of yours?"

"He is Don Julian de la Fuente."

"A Spaniard and a great man, doubtless?"

"Oh, of course, señor."

"You live with him, here at the *rancho?*"

"Oh no, señor. I live with my father and mother; in Monterey, for the most part."

"And just now you were coming from them, to pay a little visit to your grandfather?"

"I was coming from the other way; from Santa Barbara, in the south. I was going to stop to-night at the *rancho,* to go on to-morrow morning to my father's house in Monterey."

"Your grandfather is expecting you, no doubt?"

"But, señor, my grandfather is not here; he and my grandmother are at Santa Barbara! I was going with them, to visit friends there. I changed my mind and wanted to come back and return to Monterey."

"So you changed your mind! I've a notion that you do that now and then! And, having changed it, it may be you change other people's for them?"

"Why should you think that, señor?"

"Casting backward in my very excellent memory," he said dryly, "I believe that that's what you did for me not so long ago! Well, well, your sex is fickle, and what fitter than that you, the very flower of your sex, should be so to the extent of making others variable with you? So you left your grandparents in the south, and with this silly escort of yours started back this way! As events have shown, a proceeding not unattended by risk. Yet your grandparents made no objection?"

Her answer was a little longer coming this time.

"Why should you be interested in that, Captain Cavalier?"

"Because I am interested in you!" he flashed back at her. "I never saw lady like you; I never guessed there was one like you. So I would know you as one knows the palm of his own hand. I'll have nothing hidden. Here in the dark I may not see your face, but I carry the memory of it before me; I cannot look into those dove eyes of yours, so instead, while I bide my happier time, I look into your heart and mind and soul —if you have one!"

Fear began to fall away behind her. No man had ever been so bold with her; it had been Señorita Vir-

ginia Luisa de la Fuente who had, since the first unfolding of her summery little life into romantic bud, hidden herself behind smiles and sighs as behind her graceful fan while probing into the breasts of men. It thrilled her a little to have him declare his intent thus forcefully; also it set her to raising her own barriers to abet that of the night.

"And if," she said coolly, "I do not choose to answer?"

She had forgotten that all the while her horse's reins were in his hand. She was reminded quickly enough as both horses were brought to a standstill, and so close together that her swaying body brushed his.

"In that case—and mind you I'd not be the one to weep over such a turn of events—I'd pluck you from your saddle, set you before me, and in a very few minutes I'd have you alone with me in the blackest heart of the forests here. We'd soon have us a great roaring fire; in its light I'd see your face and your eyes—aye, and I'd have such answers to my questions as suited me!"

With a rush all her fears came flocking back. Picton and the others were so far ahead . . .

"You have been good to me, señor; good and gentle——"

"That I have!" he cut in emphatically. "What the devil his name possesses me to-night?"

"I will answer you. I meant only—— Oh, let us ride on, señor; I grow afraid——"

He seemed to hesitate, and though his hesitation may have been only simulation and though certainly it endured but a few instants, she was numb with terror before his light laugh bespoke his tolerant good humor.

Again they rode on, she saying hastily, most eager now for any talk:

"Your question, señor? Oh yes; if my grandparents made any objection to my coming back? Yes, they did. They wanted me to wait for them; to be more properly escorted and chaperoned, señor. But they are so good to me, Don Julian and his La Mariposa! They gave in at last."

"A very pretty answer," he told her, chuckling once more. "It tells me that my little beauty likes to have her own way; that she certainly does have it when it is a matter of grandparents! Has the world spoiled you, Virginia?"

"The world has been very good to me, señor," she said lightly.

"No one has ever dictated to you, do this, do that? As I am in the enticing position to do to-night?"

"No, señor." It came steadily, but very faintly.

"Now but you tempt me sorely! To be the very first—— Well, never mind. I grow informed upon your family history. You return, all of a sudden, to Monterey. Why this abrupt change of plan? Why so great haste in returning to your father's home?"

"There was to be a dance," she explained thoughtfully. "I had a gown especially made before I left Monterey; there was to have been nothing like it in all California. And Josefa, the stupid thing—she is my maid, señor—forgot to pack it for me, and when we were well on our way, lied to me about it, being afraid to tell me——"

"So the little lady's maid is afraid of her!" He was laughing delightedly. "Scrap by scrap we learn that we have to deal with one who was born and bred to the pretty maidenly trick of stamping a foot and setting

conflagrations with a scornful glance! And so, we came all the way back for a dress, did we?"

"What would you?" she asked simply. "I had made up my mind——"

"Yes, I understand all that. Now tell me this: With your grandparents away visiting, who remains at the *rancho* whither we journey now?"

She was biting her lips, but he could not see; nor could he see the look flashing up in her eyes. To be jerked up in the midst of what she was saying, to be interrupted here and directed there, was just the thing to draw upon him such a glance as he had made sure she had the way of employing.

"No one," she retorted stiffly.

"How, no one? But surely a big *rancho* is not deserted entirely!"

"No one of the *gente,* señor," she amended. "Of course, household servants remain, and Indian *vaqueros* to mind the horses and cattle. They, with a son of Great Picton acting in his father's place as major-domo——"

"Beyond those, not a soul at the place?"

"Not a soul, señor."

"And you were returning this way to a deserted *rancho?*"

"Why not, señor?" she queried. "Am I not safe when I am at Don Julian's *hacienda?* The Great Picton is with me, and he is more like a father than a servant; his son is there, and he would die at a word for any one of the De la Fuente. Then, for *duenna,* I have Juana here."

"Oh, you are very well provided for, no doubt. Come; here is a bit of open; let us gallop."

He grew silent for a long while. She never gave

over straining her eyes in the hopeless task of making out his face in the dark. What was he thinking now? What did he mean to do? He could be gentle with her; he could be terrible. Was he balancing two impulses?

After a clearing they penetrated a thick pine forest. Now and then Picton shouted back to them. "This way!" and had curt answers from Captain Cavalier. The trail steepened again, and grew precariously narrow. They were on a sheer mountain-side; from the side and far, far below rose the babble and singing murmurs of the San Antonio creek. Once, at Picton's bellowed urgings, they dismounted and went forward on foot, leading their horses. The faint calling of the creek very far below told them to what a dizzy height they clung, how hazardous their way.

They passed out of the canyon; the stars so long hidden multiplied over a greatly widened expanse of sky. Once more they could ride abreast, and presently they were galloping again. They started up a herd of half-wild horses that broke the night silence with their trumpeting neighs. The jaded saddle animals quickened and nickered in response.

"Nearly there now?" queried Captain Cavalier out of a long enforced silence.

"Yes."

"You will invite me within doors? You will perhaps even set a flask of wine and a biscuit before me? You will let me look at you clearly for the first time? I have seen you by a shifting firelight; I want to look at you by the steady, not wind-blown, light of all the candles in the house!"

"I owe you everything," she cried out with a sudden

rush of gratitude. Danger lay far behind now, familiar, every-day, homely surroundings grew reassuring all about her. In the phrase of the day she said simply: "My grandfather, were he here, señor, would be the first to assure you that everything you find here is yours, señor."

"Yes, you owe me everything!" He repeated her words, but invested them with a strange quality, half earnest and half fierce, all his own. "*Everything.*"

The horses' hoofs hammered on, a lively tattoo. The man brooded, his thoughts as darkly hid from her as the face under his broad hat. From that eager, pulsating rush of warm gratitude she was flung back into uncertainty. In her ears there was only the pound of hoofbeats; it was as though they were beating into her brain the words: "He can be gentle. He can be terrible."

In a grove of noble moss-bearded oaks Picton had already dismounted. A black, square, solid mass was the adobe home. Picton was calling out commands. One of the Indians was off with the horses, the other had hurried on to the house.

Virginia Luisa came down into Picton's extended arms.

"Thanks be to God, señorita," he said in a low, deep rumble, "we are returned safe."

Captain Cavalier dismounted.

"I am invited within for a glass of wine," he said briefly. "You, Picton, take our horses."

They could hear the old fellow breathing; a fierce rush of air when, as now, he cudgelled his wits and held his tongue.

"Juana," he said sharply to his daughter, "run

ahead into the house. I but step over to our own house to tell my sons what has happened. At the first call, I come."

Virginia Luisa was leading the way, running through the little gate and along a path among roses and trees. Captain Cavalier caught up with her at a bound, sought and found her hand and held it as they went forward. About an angle of massive wall, to a little dark door which was opened from within just as they reached it by an Indian boy bearing a candle.

Then still side by side, and with Captain Cavalier's hand tight upon her own imprisoned one, they entered a large room, but illy lighted by the solitary candle borne aloft. Through the room to another door which the servant threw open, standing aside for them to pass.

This chamber, the main *sala* of the home, was brightly lighted. Virginia Luisa stepped into it; Captain Cavalier followed at the length of their combined arms. He saw the room's spaciousness illuminated by a full score of candles in tall silver candlesticks. He saw a table spread with the remains of a feast, red and purple and golden fruits remaining amidst a fair sprinkling of bottles and glass. But before this he saw the occupants of this house, which it had been promised him was deserted; half a dozen gentlemen about a second table littered with cards.

"So," said Captain Cavalier, clapping his hand to his sword as he stood with her upon the threshold, "this little surprise for me is a token of your gratitude, is it?"

CHAPTER VII

So this was the deserted house she had promised him! Captain Cavalier saw himself tricked toward his undoing. The girl, then, with her dove-eyes was my Lady Deceit, was she?

Yet, making his swift surmises, he stood his ground. He was in an open doorway, with a dark empty room at his back. Escape, did it come to that, remained open behind him by the way he had entered.

"Don Pablo!" cried Virginia Luisa and darted forward. "Your Excellency here!"

Captain Cavalier's brows shot up. Oho, so she had led him into the presence of none other than Lieutenant-Colonel Pablo de Sola, governor of Spanish California!

The six gentlemen sprang to their feet, their faces indicating various degrees of amazement. Candle flames winked again in silver buckles. Times were hard in California, yet ever *noblesse oblige,* and these young fellows, scions of the best families, flaunted their best of broad scarlet sashes and gay hair ribbons in the face of hardship past and a present of ominous threat. Among them but a glance was needed to select Don Pablo Vicente de Sola.

He was a man of nearly sixty, but one with whom age dealt lightly, leaving little mark save in the whiteness of hair and beard. Both he, alone of all here, wore short. A man broad and thick, of a physique to win high approval from a blacksmith, as rugged and strong as an ox, as ruddy as full-blooded health and

many hours in the open could make him, he retained a certain youthful vigor expressed in every gesture, shining in the brilliant eyes under the heavy brows. And finally, as arrogant as any Basque who ever lived—which is to say more arrogant than all Aragon!

"Señorita!" he exclaimed in that voice which he made echo up and down young California in his day, a ponderous, rumbling voice which ever grew rough and harsh with any emotion. "But I have just been told that you were at Santa Barbara!"

Captain Cavalier, having marked him well, bestowed his piercing regard upon the gentleman standing next him, one with thin, hawkish nose, crisply curling ebon side-whiskers and eyes which leapt to meet his own like antagonistic daggers. This one, who he was presently to learn was Don Nicolas Vara, had stared at Virginia Luisa with the strangest look in the world, then with that flash of enmity at him who escorted her.

A quick smile danced into Captain Cavalier's eyes. For it was given him already to revise a hasty opinion: just as this company had not looked to see her arrive, so had she been as surprised to find them here. Eliminate that suspected trickery on her part, and the situation was not without zest.

"I returned unexpectedly," Virginia Luisa was explaining swiftly to Governor Sola. "I wanted to go back to Monterey."

"Yes, yes," said Sola with a hint of impatience. For so much was obvious, and he was now staring at the figure in the doorway. There stood one who was a stranger, and it was His Excellency's affair and his pleasure to see that no unexplained strangers set foot in the province. Furthermore, there was a certain

dare-devilish carriage there confronting him, a very essence of breezy truculence, a way of fingering hilt and touching pistol which caught his eye. Therefore he ended tartly: "But you have not told us who is this young man. I do not think that I know you, señor?"

Captain Cavalier brought his heels together, bethought him to touch his hat, which he removed with a flourish and bent forward, bowing. The bow itself was an act to deepen the governor's frown. For it was not performed in the Spanish fashion; there may be shades and degrees in bows as in all courtly gestures. And Captain Cavalier was treating His Excellency to his first view of the graceful salute of a young Virginian, one with French blood in his veins. It was that blood, perhaps, which actuated him now, resulting in a bow that was insouciant, elegant—and very gay.

Then, erect again, he turned his eyes upon Señorita de la Fuente. His smile remained and now suddenly grew more markedly mirthful. He had misjudged her a moment ago when convicting her of an ugly bit of deceit; now he would let her speak and he held himself, outwardly all unconcern, to listen to her first words. She could say: "He is a captain of pirates!" She could say: "He came in my hour of need." He vowed to himself that it was as good as a play, to await her choice of answers. And yet, when she appeared to hesitate, he was inwardly very tense.

"He is a gallant gentleman!" cried Virginia Luisa, her cheeks suddenly aflame. "We were beset by a crowd of ruffians. Ignacio was killed. Great Picton was pulled down and beaten. I was in their hands; they tore off my necklace. He saved us and brought us home in safety. He, all alone!"

Gayer than ever were his eyes now. He turned them upon her and for a moment, as she stood looking at him, forgot the others in the room. From her it was not to Sola that he looked; some sure instinct drew his regard to the man with a hawk's beak for a nose. Don Nicolas Vara's face had gone a sudden red, then darkened swiftly. In his look Captain Cavalier was free to read suspicion, distrust, and finally, the clearest and most readable of all emotions, swift jealous animosity.

But now in Sola's booming voice was only high commendation.

"Señor, you win the gratitude of us all! I am glad that I, representing all California, am here to express that gratitude. You have saved untarnished one of our most precious jewels. Yes, señor; first you win our thanks; then as we think upon it, our envy! One may envy you your privilege." He turned banteringly to the man at his elbow. "Eh, my friend Don Nicolas? I know one who would gladly have stood in this gentleman's place to-night!"

Vara's attempt at a smile was a dismal failure. He kept staring at Captain Cavalier as he said:

"This man is a stranger. No Spaniard, either."

That was enough to bring back the sober look to Sola's face. To keep California to the Californians, it had ever been Spain's policy to shut her doors against all foreigners.

"True. What, señor, is your nationality? From where do you come?"

"I am American, señor," retorted Captain Cavalier.

Sola's brows went down, then rose sharply. He had little love for Americans, and with reason.

"From Boston, señor? Or Baltimore?"

"From neither, an it please Your Excellency." He stopped there and turned to look at Virginia Luisa.

She saw his look, caught his thought, read his gay challenge and flashed back:

"If the gentleman has told me truly, Don Pablo, he is a—Virginian!"

"Right!" cried Captain Cavalier lightly. "Upon such a matter why should I deceive the lady? Or why seek to hide from you gentlemen that of which I am so proud? To the death, *caballeros,* a Virginian!" Sola, immediately concerned with what might be a matter of state policy, had no thought to what meanings might lie under words or in glances. But Don Nicolas Vara caught an expression here, an inflection there, which stirred jealousy and suspicion together and darkened his frown. He plucked the governor by the sleeve and began whispering. Sola started and fell to frowning with Vara.

"I trust, señor," he said with a new quality in his voice, one of chill dignity, "that our gratitude may not appear the less if we are forced to follow those first words with others? Unfortunately you come among us at a time when California is alert and watchful; when every stranger must be asked to give an account of himself. It is more than a month since word was sent up to me at Monterey from Comandante De la Guerra at Santa Barbara *presidio,* that we were in danger of an attack from certain pirates who term themselves *insurgentes,* but who are none the less murderers and thieves and traitors! I have begun of late to believe this a false alarm; we've had a-plenty of such tales for some years now. Yet watchfulness is the watchword with us, señor."

Captain Cavalier nodded as much as to say that here

was a condition which he could readily understand, though no concern of his.

"And you, señorita," said Sola, "in whose house I have thus so made myself at home—you shall have both my apology and my explanation—and where I am forced to ask these inhospitable questions, will understand that it is only duty which actuates me? This gentleman, though he has served you so nobly, yet remains a stranger to you. You do not know who he is, what his business. Even his name——"

"Señor," cried the girl warmly, "you use the word *hospitality*. Let it ever be sacred with us. This gentleman must be asked no questions here which he does not volunteer to answer. He has shown himself a hero! He has done for me, and all unaided, what no other man in all California would have done."

Captain Cavalier bowed deeply.

"You honor me most highly, most sweet lady," he said, that gay smile still shining bright in his eyes. "Far beyond my worth, alas."

"Come, come," said Sola impatiently. "Hospitality is one thing, señorita. Loyalty and patriotism are others. A stranger——"

"Yet one has shown himself not only a gentleman, but noble!" said Virginia Luisa in haste. For it had dawned upon her, too, that she had promised her escort a house empty of his enemies, and that if they pressed him too hard with questions the affair might end unhappily for him. In that case, how cruelly she had rewarded his valor! For, be he what he might, it remained that he had come valiantly and fearlessly to her rescue, and that she owed him, as she had said, everything.

But the governor saw his duty clear before him and was not to be turned aside. He it was who ruled California; to none did he report save the viceroy himself in Mexico City, and Mexico was far away and so hard beset with her own revolution that she had scant thought and but a broken authority for this remote province. Almost a petty king was this sturdy Basque; one to brook no interference.

"I must recall to you, señorita," he said brusquely, "that though most undoubtedly this gentleman has befriended you in your hour of need to-night, yet you know nothing of him. Not even his name, I dare say——"

"Oh, pardon me, Your Excellency! But in the excitement of the moment I forgot to present him properly. May I now make known to you the Captain Cavalier!"

No sooner were the words out than she bit her lips, wishing that thus she could have recalled the words themselves. She had never heard the name before to-night; how could she know that these others knew it well and that she could have chanced upon no more unfortunate thing than the speaking it?

At one and the same time she fell to regretting and to wondering. She saw not only Sola and his friend, Don Nicolas, startled, but the four others as well. Two of them wore the uniform of the royal presidial troops and had ridden with His Excellency as his aides; the remaining two were young aristocrats, as one saw at the first glance, young blades whose chief responsibilities lay in keeping their hands soft, their honor untarnished, and their loyalty unquestioned. Every man of them bristled.

"Captain Cavalier!" boomed Sola when he found his tongue. "What! Captain Cavalier?"

"Captain Cavalier!" gasped Don Nicolas. He had fallen back a pace as though staggered by a blow. "Here? Alive? No, I tell you! Captain Cavalier is dead—drowned——"

"Captain Cavalier?" Sola repeated, muttering ominously now, his frown one of that black and ungovernable rage for which he was famous. "Leader of traitors, renegades—pirates, cut-throats, murderers! Such a man here, in California? And daring to set foot before me! What, sirrah! is this some mad drunken escapade? Some insolent masquerade? Answer me, señor! And see that you speak swift, true, and direct. I'll tolerate no evasions."

"But I tell you," said Don Nicolas, plainly perturbed, "that Captain Cavalier is dead."

"How now," growled the governor, turning on his favorite savagely. "How do you know so much? And why have I not been told?"

Don Nicolas Vara, thinking swiftly, answered slowly.

"I have heard rumors, Don Pablo. Only to-day, before you arrived here. I reserved such information as I had until we should be alone. To be sure they are only rumors of a wreck but——"

"Curse your rumors," snapped Sola. "I grow sick of such babble; God knows we have been fed full of it during two years now. You, sir," and he addressed himself threateningly to him about whom all this talk snapped and crackled like summer lightning, and who had not stirred or spoken, "answer! Who the devil are you?"

Captain Cavalier, with all eyes hard upon him, gravely treated them to what interest they might find in the spectacle of a young Virginia gentleman taking snuff. There was the very essence and spirit of elegance in the act. When he had done, and had flicked a speck of brown dust from his sleeve and had replaced the little silver snuff-box in his pocket, it was toward Señorita Virginia Luisa that he turned. His face still wore that expression of placid gravity, yet one felt that at any moment a ripple of mirth might be expected to dance over it.

"Most sweet lady," he said with his little bow, "none regrets more than I that we did not find here a place for that quiet chat for two which we had looked to have. To you, to whom all my devoirs are vowed since some two hours ago, I must take advantage of this tardy moment to complete an introduction which circumstance harshly postponed so long. I am, madam, none other than Charles Alfred Calvert, poor gentleman of fortune, most loyal Virginian in the world and, I beg you to believe, eternally at your service."

She had hung breathless upon his words. Now, seeking to make amends, she exclaimed quickly:

"Captain Calvert! Of course. That is what you told me. And I was frightened and nervous and excited, and made of it Captain Cavalier! How stupid——"

But Sola's suspicions were up and would not down. If ever a man looked the part of that swashbuckling captain of buccaneers, he thought to see the man standing there in the doorway.

"Stuff and nonsense!" he said angrily, quick to take up the affront put upon him by this young fellow

turning to speak to the girl instead of addressing the highest authority in California. "Theatric trash! Never mind the lady now, señor. You will speak to me while I am disposed to grant you that privilege. You remain unexplained, an intruder and a stranger where such are neither invited nor tolerated. I'll have that explanation now, or by the blood of Cortez, you'll ask in vain to give it when it is too late."

From beneath a pair of highly elevated brows a pair of very keen and steady eyes were bent now upon the governor's florid face. Captain Cavalier affected to sigh.

"I observe," said he soberly, "a very tragic spectacle."

"Your meaning, sirrah! I grow impatient!"

"You were born impatient, Excellency," returned the other imperturbably. "My meaning? 'Tis this: in gazing upon all this inflated pride of the tenth Spanish governor of California, I cannot but be moved by the consideration that in him I see also—the last of the Spanish governors! As our young America along the Atlantic has lifted a strong hand to set the crown upon her own brow, so here will it be soon in the West. Spain loses her iron grip from Cape Horn to San Francisco. You had not heard?" There came a glint of humor into the bold eyes. "My advice to you, Sir Governor, is to abandon a lost cause. Mark you, I see in your clear eyes that you are no fool. Presently you'll be shouting with the rest, 'Down with Spain! *Viva Libertad!*'——"

Even Virginia Luisa gasped at such heresy. Don Nicolas Vara's black brows bunched nervously; his eyes narrowed.

"Sedition!" shouted Sola. "High treason and perfidy as black and damnable as hell itself! Ho! seize me that man. Put him under arrest! 'Tis Captain Cavalier and none other, condemned out of his own mouth."

"By your leave, dear lady?" said Captain Cavalier, and clapped on his hat.

There was a shuffling of feet, but not that rush to obey his orders which the governor had counted on. For, donning his hat, Captain Cavalier had been free to employ both hands, and now, while his right whipped out a very long, slender and keen blade, his left plucked one of the pistols from his sash.

"As you are, gentlemen!" he called coolly. "I took note on entering how you had laid aside your pistols for your game of cards. They lie on the long table yonder at your backs, just out of reach. For your better guidance, should you be moved to recklessness, I may tell you in all simplicity that I'm a terrible fellow with a pistol. Further, you'll mark how both my weapons are double-barrelled? Four discharges ready primed. And the first of them, by my honor, costs you your tenth—and last—Spanish governor!"

Sola himself for the instant was speechless. He was unarmed, his own sword had been unhooked and stood yonder against the bench along the wall.

"A word with you, Excellency," ran on Captain Cavalier, all watchfulness and speaking swiftly. "You return to Monterey in the morning? I charge you, then, with the safe conduct thither of this young lady! She is not safe here with certain ruffians, grown as distempered as jostled hornets, buzzing in a nearby cove. Mark, too, how I honor you: there is not another man

in all California I would entrust her to! Certainly not that hawk-faced man at your shoulder. Have an eye on him. And mind you," he added with a new quality of sternness, "I hold you responsible for her safe conduct. Should she know a moment's distress—you answer to me, señor!"

So did Sola's face redden that it seemed that his swollen veins must burst. Captain Cavalier, from frowning fierceness went suddenly to light laughter. A last time he turned to Virginia Luisa.

"My heart is in your hands, most sweet lady," he cried gaily. "I exist, but do not live, until we meet again. When you will not return me mine, but exchange me yours? In Monterey, madame! Gentlemen —in Monterey!"

He bowed, saluted, and, still laughing, stepped backward into the room behind him. The door slammed, a bolt was shot home, and they heard him running through the house.

Crashing through the flower garden he heard a voice calling softly:

"Señor, señor! Is that you? This way, señor!"

It was the voice of Great Picton. Wondering, Captain Cavalier hung for a moment upon his heel.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"A horse, señor. A fresh one, just saddled. I saw who was in there; I guessed that you might seek to depart in some haste. Come, señor."

Captain Cavalier fell to frowning, wondering more than ever. Yet there was no treachery in that voice. He strode closer, and found Picton holding by the reins a restive saddle horse. In a flash he was up in the saddle.

"Just why you do this, old fellow——"

"If you are Captain Cavalier or the devil's uncle," grunted Picton, "it's no affair of mine. You pulled old Picton through an ugly hole this night; more than that, you saved Picton's honor for him; and most of all, you brought my angel mistress to safety. So it's a small thing I do in return. My master, Don Julian, were he here, would have done the same."

Captain Cavalier leaned forward to clap him friendly-wise on the huge shoulder. Then, as there was lively din at the house, he shook out his reins and dashed away into the night. Picton, staring after him, heard him call back cheerily:

"I'll leave your horse for you—in Monterey."

CHAPTER VIII

"After him!" thundered Don Pablo Sola. "I'll have the dog shot before dawn!"

"No!" Virginia Luisa threw herself before the governor, catching his arm. "Let him go! He saved me to-night from worse than death, and I'll not be the one who led him to destruction here. You must let him go!"

Sola, in his blazing anger, thrust her roughly aside and ran for his sword, shouting orders. Pistols were snatched up, swords drawn; the two soldiers ran for their flintlocks. But when they found one door bolted and rushed to the other, they had again to do with the girl who stood before it, her eyes on fire with rebellion.

"Has he put a spell on the girl?" fumed the governor. "Out of the way, child. You stand in the path of the king's justice."

"No! I tell you, no!"

But he caught her up, lifted her aside, and sped through the door to the dark of the portico. After him streamed the others. Of them all Don Nicolas alone remained behind. He stood looking stonily at her.

"Is Don Pablo right?" he demanded. "Has this stranger put some spell upon you?"

"If it were true an he had," she flung back at him, treating him to the rarest picture of anger and hot scorn, "what then? Why should the matter engage you, Señor Vara?"

He began fingering his side-whisker, and for a while held his silence, struggling with some emotion which

rode him, and gaining his control gradually as slowly the dull flush faded from his swarthy cheeks.

"You know why, señorita," he said quietly at last. "You know that I love you."

"A fig for such love as yours," she told him passionately. "I have neither asked it of you nor accepted it."

"You know your mother's wishes in the matter."

"A maid does not give her heart by the clock, señor. Nor am I of a mind to wed where I am told."

He affected the shock of surprise.

"Surely, obedience to the wishes of your parents——"

"*Oh-ja-la!*" she laughed at him.

"Then there is the acquiescence, the wish of His Excellency, amounting almost to command——"

She stamped her foot, and new conflagrations seemed lighted in her eyes.

"*Uf!* How you weary me! What I have said before, señor, must I say again?"

"But I swear to you——"

"Listen!" She ran by him and outside. "*Chist!* I hear a horse running! Ah! *Virgen santisima!* they are shooting!"

Above the detonation and the rush of hoofbeats rose a clear untroubled voice, shouting gaily:

"I await you, señores all, at Monterey."

In a moment all was silence. Captain Cavalier went free for the present, since with his safe lead and the friendly dark, pursuit could end only in fruitlessness. How he had been so fortunate as to find a mount for himself at his need was not explained; Picton, who knew the value of silence, offered no solution.

"They are returning," said Vara swiftly. "Before they come, señorita, I would have you answer me a question: What did that young *Americano* mean by looking at you like that?"

"Like what?" she asked, making sudden pretense at demureness. Her heart beat lightly again now that she knew pursuit was given up.

"You saw his look!—as well as I did."

"And you? Did you not see it as well as I?" she mocked him.

"*Valgame Dios!*" muttered Vara, never a patient man. "Then tell me this: what did he mean by saying he would see you again at Monterey?"

She hid her eyes under their long lashes. She knew that the candlelight through the open door revealed her face to him. She grew but the more demure. Let him gnash his teeth all he liked!

"If it happens that he rides to Monterey, where I also go to-morrow, what then, señor?"

Vara lifted both hands as though to lay them upon her. She saw, and tantalized him with her look. Thus she drove him hard, almost to the extent of carrying out an impulse which she knew, with the others coming back into the yard, he did not dare accomplish. In the end he let his hands fall to his sides.

"An hour after he is seen in Monterey," he told her angrily, "he will stand with his back to the *presidio* wall looking down the throats of a dozen muskets."

Ah, but she was afraid of that! Why must they hunt him down like a wild animal? What harm had he done them? They should let him go his way—yet she sighed even at that. Thoughtfully she went back into the *sala*. To-night she began to glimpse for the

first time that there could arise situations of downright hopelessness.

She heard Don Pablo Sola stamping along, muttering at every step. As he came in she turned to meet him, and hastened to be the first to speak.

"You honor my grandfather's home with your presence, Don Pablo," she said quickly. "Don Julian and my grandmother both will be so sorry to have missed you. As for me, you will see that I am very tired from a long day riding and from to-night's terrible adventure. Therefore, I am sure that you will excuse me that I may retire to my room? The house, señor, is yours."

She dropped him a courtesy, and with a bright nod to the gentlemen who came in at his back, turned to leave the room. But Sola, with no tempering of the frown darkening his face, threw up his hand commandingly, exclaiming:

"I regret it, señorita, but I must have a word."

"Cannot it wait until morning, señor? I am so tired."

He handed her a chair; then stepped to the table for a glass of wine. The former she accepted with a sigh; the latter she waved aside.

"Your Excellency commands," she said, and looked up to him questioningly.

"Who were those men who attacked you? Where did it happen? How many of them? Where did you leave them? Tell me; tell me everything."

She answered his questions, one after another, at first impersonally, and truly seeming bowed down with fatigue; presently with color aroused by memories

starting up from her own recital. She lived again through a period of terror, wild hope and despair; she saw Captain Cavalier in every act and gesture. She broke off suddenly at the end, realizing that she was on her feet again and talking with a hot rush of words, and that it was of Captain Cavalier, ever Captain Cavalier, that she was speaking. Governor Sola's eyes were hard and suspicious upon her.

"You were best with your mother, young woman," he told her sharply. "What sort of thing is this, for a girl to go travelling about the country as you do? We ride early, returning to Monterey. It is best that you ride with us."

Those were days when a girl was ever looked to for humble obedience to parents and to one like Sola, standing as he did now in the place of parents. Yet, even in those days and all days before, there were ever maids who had wills of their own. Virginia Luisa, like that little old white-haired lady who was now her adoring grandmother, and who, in her own youth, had been that La Mariposa of whom something has been told elsewhere, would not have stood where she did to-night had she been the one to let others do her thinking and planning—and loving—for her.

It was on the tip of her tongue, which had the trick of sharpness at need, to remind Governor Sola that whereas he might order his soldiers about, he held no warrant to dictate to her. Yet it remained that she meant in any case to go on to Monterey, and that she would be more than glad of such an escort as he and his gentlemen offered. And also she was inspired with a retort which pleased her far better. She made it with her best dimpling smile.

"I see, *Señor Gobernador,* that you have taken to

heart that responsibility which Captain Cavalier placed upon you, and that you mean to carry out his command!"

"*Demonio!*" roared Don Pablo. And whipping about upon Vara, he demanded: "Is this the maid you told me you were to wed?"

Señor Vara inclined his head gravely.

"Such has been my fondest hope, señor; such, I have had reason to think, was the señorita's wish also; such, without doubt, is the will of her parents."

"Then, by the head of Cortez!" said Sola heavily, "the thing were best done without delay."

Virginia Luisa bestowed upon California's governor her slow, inscrutable smile. She could look like Mona Lisa.

"Since we must ride early, then I am doubly excused to retire now," she said quietly. "Gentlemen all, I shall send Juana to you, and Isidrio; they will do all that can be done in our too poor home to make for your to-night's comfort. You are at home here, señores—and *buenas noches.*"

They bowed with due gallantry, all save Don Nicolas, who was as stiff as a ramrod, and His Excellency, who remained unbending and outraged dignity. One of the young fellows in uniform sprang to the door, holding it open for her to pass. Then Sola, dropping heavily into the first chair, began rubbing his chin reflectively.

"A round score or more of the rascals on the beach yonder," he said, staring up at Vara. "Too many for us six, or we'd ride upon them this night. Were only Don Julian and his family not away! There would be enough of them, what with his sons and grandsons, to help me put these wretches to the sword. Well, the

thing must await my return to Monterey. You saw nothing of them, of course, in your ride to-day, Don Nicolas?"

"Of course not," said Vara, starting from a reverie of his own.

"Who can they be? Not the cursed Russians, plainly."

"Smugglers again, perhaps," said Vara indifferently. "It would not be the first time such a crew commanded by a cursed Boston man had touched at that same beach to put off and take on contraband."

"So you think it's only smugglers?"

Vara shrugged.

"Doubtless. And doubtless also, after the affair of to-night, they have abandoned their captain and put out to sea. By morning I wonder if we shall even have a chance to see a sail from the Santa Lucias?"

"Yet," mused Sola, "at a time like this, when already we are warned of a traitorous attack from the sea, is it not at least possible that they are other and worse than smugglers? Their deed to-night smacks of something of more sinister purport than mere contraband."

"You ride at dawn, as you have said," said Vara thoughtfully. "If you approve, I remain a few hours behind. For my part, I shall ride before daybreak up into the Santa Lucias. With my own eyes I shall see what is to be seen. Then I too will haste to Monterey, overtaking Your Excellency, or arriving shortly after, bringing you full word."

And so it was arranged, Don Nicolas serving his own secret purpose and Don Pablo thanking him warmly for his patriotic zeal.

Breakfast was served early, horses brought in and saddled by Indian *vaqueros*, long-rowelled spurs buckled on. From the house, in a fresh riding habit, came Virginia Luisa looking eager and bright, fully rested in what must have been a night of pleasant dreams. She had only the gayest of smiles for all; in a moment she made His Excellency forget that any harsh words had ever passed. He patted her little hand with his big one, and vowed gallantly that he had never had so pretty and charming a riding companion. Side by side they led the way, the others falling in behind them.

Thus in the first brillance of the crisp November morning they clattered by the adobe walls and dark tiled roofs of the Mission San Antonio. They heard the sunrise bell calling all to worship; by now the mission was hidden from them by the little hills through which their way led. They forsook the San Antonio creek to take the more direct way through a pass among the hills toward the valley of the Salinas. For hours they traversed a gentle wilderness given over to deer, wild horses, and occasional Indian *rancherias*.

"Be not dismayed, señorita," said Sola pleasantly once, as their horses toiled up one of the steepest bits of difficult trail. "I shall not rest until I am in Monterey, but you I shall not put to the hardship of so many hard miles in the saddle. I shall arrange for you to stay to-night at Soledad or, the furthest, at the Rancho del Rey."

She only laughed at him, demanding:

"Am I not my own mother's daughter, Don Pablo? There are two things at which I never grow tired; at which, I pray, I may never grow tired. To ride, señor!

To dance! All night, all day, and all night again, I can keep it up. Those are affairs to rest one, not to fatigue."

He looked at her approvingly. Her cheeks were rosy, her eyes bright; she rode with the natural grace of one who had been familiar with a place in the saddle when she was six.

They came out of the hills and to a first sight of the broad, shallow Salinas, muddy and brown with the first light rains. For still other hours they rode across a wide, level plain. They heard the bells of the Mission of Our Lady of the Solitudes ringing the Angelus. They saw the brown-skinned neophytes coming in, marshalled by their overseers to noon prayer and *pozole;* they caught glimpses from a distance of the iron-gray gowned figure of Father Florencio Ibañez slowly pacing the long corridor. As they rode nearer they marked how his tall, powerful frame at last bowed to the weight of years and the added burden of his mortal sickness.

They drew rein, and the old priest, white and venerable, blessed them.

"Dismount, my children," he bade them hospitably.

When his failing eyes told him who his guests were he beckoned quickly to his associate, Father Antonio, saying softly and with his old-time chuckle:

"'Tis only Don Pablo Sola and some of his soldiers. Let us see that he dines on the regular *pozole;* I'd chasten his military spirit for him by serving him the vegetable gruel our Indians fare on, and, while he eats, for seasoning I'd tell him again how good and great a man my friend and his predecessor, Governor Arrillaga, was! These soldiers! These Sons of Mars!"

Here they nooned. Good old Father Florencio had his last earthly chance to take his fling at a class of which he so frankly disapproved. And for once Pablo Sola curbed his quick temper and let the gray-gowned soldier of God make free with his sharp little thrusts.

From Soledad Mission they were carried along on fresh horses, ever with the river leading them northward, to the spot where the Rancho del Rey was already the nucleus of what later was to grow into the pretty little city of Salinas. The day had grown gloomy and wet; a sharp wind blew in their faces, which dripped with the mist, half fog, half rain, which came billowing in from the sea. Again they rested briefly, dining, taking a glass of wine; again they changed horses and rode on. It was almost dusk when the boom of old ocean filled their ears. Here, at last, was Monterey.

"*Dios,* it has been a day!" said His Excellency, brushing the drops from his bushy white eyebrows. "Señorita, you have astonished me."

These last two hours had been ridden in silence. The weather depressed and, despite her early avowal, she had begun to droop in the saddle and a little pallor had crept into her cheeks. Now, however, she sat erect, her eyes brightened, a faint tint as of blush roses returned. Just before her, half seen through dusk and mist, lay Monterey. She began looking quickly this way and that. It was as though she looked for some one.

Yonder, half hidden, fitfully revealed by the shifting gray vapors, the bay glinted dully and vanished by turns. From the beach the gentle slope ran up to the thick woods, and between water and wood was the *presidio,* a sturdy square enclosure of stone and earthen

walls some two hundred yards square. From the flagstaff in the centre of the walled *plaza* hung the red and yellow standard of Spain, its lion rampant. Sola, at the first sight of it, lifted his hand in salute.

Still further up the slope and near the edge of the wood stood the *castillo,* Monterey's principal fort, placed at this superior elevation, whence its guns with wider range might sweep the bay. Then there was the sprinkling of houses, some two-score in all, from the finest of the homes to such squat huts as Tio Armenta's little wine shop and the straw *jacals* of the Indians, constituting all that there was of the town, the capital city of California.

It was toward the most pretentious of these homes, a large, square, white-walled edifice within a stone's throw of the *castillo,* that the governor turned now.

"I do myself the honor of escorting Señorita de la Fuente to the very door of her father's house," he said affably. "You, señores, will ride into the *presidio,* and will inform Comandante Estudillo that I shall expect a word with him in my apartments on my arrival there shortly. Come, señorita; a lively gallop to end our little ride with a dash!"

A moment later, their horses turned over to the little flock of household servants who appeared from all hands at the sound of hoofs in the yard, they entered the town home of Don Hilario de la Fuente. A tall, dark, handsome woman of fifty, though looking ten years younger, with remarkably expressive eyes, keen and intelligent, met them at the door. This was Virginia Luisa's mother. Thirty years ago, when her own blood was running hot in the channels of youth in its heyday, there had been those who named her the

Tigress . . . among them, at one time, that same Don Hilario who now stood just behind her. His proper and customary place. Himself ever an amiable and gentle and mollifying man, prone to shirk the galling burden of responsibility, he was Doña Manuela's husband. He remained courtly, dressed in the best that these uncertain times allowed, took enormous pride in his wife, and invariably acquiesced in her judgments.

If Virginia Luisa had counted upon startling her father and mother she was fated to disappointment. Neither of her parents appeared in the least surprised that she was here, instead of being some two hundred miles farther south at Santa Barbara. All warmth of welcome was bestowed upon Don Pablo Sola; the swift look flashed from mother to daughter was in ancient family code. It said: "Just wait until we can be alone!"

"May God keep Your Excellency," Señora de la Fuente was saying fervently while Don Pablo bowed over her hand. "You honor us beyond our deserts in riding to our door."

"Señora, behold me at your feet. Señor, your most humble servant."

Señora de la Fuenta was overwhelmed, as was the fashion. Don Hilario made his best bow, and assured His Excellency that even on so dull a day the appearance of Don Pablo Sola flooded the environs of their modest home with summer sunlight.

"It is I, señor and señora, who am ravished if I may serve, ever so humbly."

"Uf!" said Virginia Luisa under her breath, her red-heeled slippers restive.

"But you will honor us further, Your Excellency?" exclaimed the fashionable matron. "Enter, Don Pablo."

Don Pablo, however, excused himself. He must hasten to his quarter in the *presidio;* a matter of importance. An affair of state; nothing less could hold him back from so distinguished a door opened so hospitably.

"I must talk with the comandante immediately," he explained. "I did not count on returning so speedily; he is not expecting me——"

Virginia Luisa's mother stared at him in wonder.

"But, señor, we had your message this morning! Comandante Estudillo as well——"

"Message? What message? I sent no message," said Sola, staring in his turn.

"But surely, Don Pablo, you have forgotten. Your messenger came straight to us, first of all; here he left the horse which he told us he had borrowed at the *rancho* of papa Don Julian; he tarried long enough to sip a glass of wine with us and tell us that all was well with our little daughter, and that you in person assumed the responsibility of bringing her to us——"

She broke off short at the look upon the governor's face. His jaw dropped, his eyes grew large with amazement.

"Don Pablo!" she stammered. "What is it?"

"Tell me more," he commanded savagely. "What next did he—this messenger of mine—do?"

"He excused himself and hastened to the *presidio,* to convey Your Excellency's commands to the comandante——"

"*Demonio!*" bellowed Sola. "He went to the *pre-*

sidio? Perhaps Estudillo entertained him within the walls?"

"Oh surely, señor. From here we could see. They were together an hour, was it not, Don Hilario? And then Comandante Estudillo rode away. We thought at your orders, to meet you——"

And now the dark suspicion broke in on her that Don Pablo, who had despatched a messenger and then forgotten, had gone stark mad before her eyes. For, hat in one hand and sword in the other, he ran as no one had ever seen California's dignified executive run before. He forgot his horse to dash a hundred yards on foot—that itself, in a land where a man mounted to ride across a road, was enough to set tongues wagging. But there was worse; for as he ran, Don Pablo lifted his roughened voice in such syllables, smacking more of camp than court, as to make Señora de la Fuente clap her hands to her ears. As for Don Hilario, coming to himself with a start, he caught his little daughter by the arm and ran her within doors, that her pure young ears might not be sullied by the unlimited vocabulary of a governor in wrath.

And, as for Virginia Luisa herself—how her eyes lighted up!

CHAPTER IX

THE *maddest* man in all the length and breadth of fair California was its governor. In five fiery minutes he ran the gamut; anger frothing and bubbling over into unleashed rage, rage boiling like a hot cauldron of smoking oil, blazing fury catching him like a conflagration, and in the end Pablo Sola, the maddest man Monterey ever saw or ever cared to see.

In those five minutes he had stormed across the *plaza* of the *presidio,* bursting in through the great gate in the twelve-foot-high wall, storming to his own apartments, bellowing for his orderly; he had called one man a liar, another a fool, and had knocked a third flat down; he had caused a fourth, the innocent drunken vagabond, Molina, to be thrown into the adobe jail and ordered him a dozen lashes. Molina's offense, good-natured liquor-loving do-nothing that he was, resided in the fact that he dared in his shabby person hold a certain grotesque, caricaturish sort of resemblance to the governor himself; and that he had chosen this inauspicious moment, drunk as usual, to present himself to the wrathful eye.

Sola was ever a man capable of powerful emotions, one to fly into extravagant passion or to react to the vastest joyousness. There were those who knew him only as affable and friendly, loving a good laugh; there were others, many of them with the unfortunate Molina among their numbers, who found him peevish

over trifles, sullen, ill-natured and, snatching at provocation, an irate tyrant.

Comandante Estudillo was nowhere to be found, had not been seen about the *presidio* since noon. For that Don Pablo cursed Captain Cavalier until the beams of his low ceiling vibrated to the thunder of his voice. Then came such a bit of news as made him forget even Captain Cavalier. But the news itself brought him again to a need for the comandante, and that unfulfilled need carried him once again to Captain Cavalier.

"Find me that traitor, that murderous scoundrel, that damnable spy, that pirate!" he roared, "and I'll hang him in the gateway there, with my own hands."

But again was he driven by the very force of ominous circumstance to forget Captain Cavalier. The news, which had just been brought in to him by a sentinel riding on his bloody spurs, was that which all California had dreaded for six weeks. On the sixth day of October there had arrived at Santa Barbara the genial Dutch captain, Henry Gyzelaar, of the brig *Clarion,* conveying to his friend, Comandante Don José de la Guerra y Noriega, the dread tidings that an attack upon California was imminent. Himself hasting from the Hawaiian Islands, Captain Gyzelaar warned the comandante that Hypolite Bouchard was even now fitting out his piratical craft in a port of the island king, Kamehameha, and might be looked for daily. De la Guerra set a *correo violento* upon the swiftest horse in his stables and sent the man racing northward. From the instant on the second day after leaving Santa Barbara when the messenger rode into Monterey all California was on the *qui vive.* Time had passed; preparations were made hurriedly; every-

thing was in readiness. But with passing weeks fears passed; Sola himself began to scoff at this, but another false alarm.

And now the sentinel, who had nearly killed a horse in riding the short distance from his lookout at the Point of Pines, was crying wildly:

"The pirates! They are here, Excellency! Two great black frigates that will drop anchor in the harbor before nightfall!"

And, with the critical hour at last arrived, no comandante at the post! Sola ground his teeth. Yet here were the two sergeants and young corporal Vallejo.

"You, Gomez," shouted Sola, "to the *castillo!* Man the guns there. You Vallejo, to our new battery by the beach. By me, Estrada! I am in command in everything. Sound the *generala!*"

The three ran out, shouting commands. In the *plaza* in another moment there was the rush of feet, the snapping of orders. All was in confusion that the more swiftly might all be in order. The *generala* sounded, that unaccustomed warning rumble of the drum, conveying to all who heard, men, women, little frightened children, the ominous message:

"The pirates have come!"

Excitement and clamor within the presidial walls gave place swiftly to order and discipline. Monterey, at one moment a tiny drowsing outpost lulled by the lapping of a vast and empty Pacific, was become in another a stubborn military garrison. As word was tossed about that at last the buccaneers were in the offing, this pigmy capital city of California stiffened itself against the impact.

For a full six weeks every man, civilian as well as wearer of the king's uniform, knew just what was expected of him when the *generala* sounded. But never had the all too small garrison seemed so inadequate as now when called on for the first time in history to repel a foreign foe. Of the regulars there were some forty in all, these constituting infantry, artillery, and cavalry! Sergeant Gomez, calling to his two artillerymen by name, rushed off with them to the fort. Corporal Vallejo, with his own similarly small force, repaired to the battery on the beach, a rude affair of stone and earth hastily thrown up during the last few days. In the *plaza,* Sergeant Estrada marshalled what remained of the forces.

Meanwhile, again in his rooms, Sola had instructed his orderly; with not Monterey alone, but the long sweep of the entire province menaced, the governor commanded that *correos violentos*, mounted upon the fastest horses, be in instant readiness to ride with the alarm. Orders began to pour forth; a messenger, riding from the first jump as though the devil ran at his stirrup, sped northward to carry the word to Comandante Luis Arguello at San Francisco. Another southward, striking out with a fine fierce burst of speed for the first lap of the long ride down to Santa Barbara. There was the thunder of hoofs up and down California that memorable night, a night of thick darkness, scudding clouds, and gusts of rain. Messengers sped from mission to broad *rancho*, stopping only for a shouted word, a glass of wine tossed down a dry throat, a fresh horse saddled and ridden with a fresh burst of headlong speed. Traitors, murderers were striking! Let all California gird herself to strike back, a doughty

blow for her king, her free hearths, her unviolated homes!

There was the rumble, like another magnified *generala,* of the great wooden wheels of the *caretas* lumbering behind their yokes of goaded oxen as, at Sola's commands, families began to take their hasty departures. The women and children were to be carried to a safe distance from the coast, as far as the Rancho del Rey, further to Mission Soledad, Mission San Juan Bautista, Mission San Antonio to-morrow. They went in rude carts or on horseback, and with them went the most precious of their belongings, silver plate from the few wealthy homes, jewels and fans and silks of the more fortunate señoras and señoritas, simple household goods from the poorer homes. With them an escort of the old men and Indian servants.

Yet not all of Monterey's women folk joined in that first hasty flight. In the home of Virginia Luisa's father and mother, Don Hilario raced about, from room to room, in a fine fire of military ardor, calling out:

"You are ready now, my loves? Fly!—*Demonio!* where is my sword? What have they done with my sword?—Manuela, my beloved! Virginia Luisa, my darling!" He gathered one, then the other into his nervous embrace, then dashed away, shouting: "Tomás, Mariano! Come; run, *muchachos!* It is life and death now; you ride with your mistresses to safety, and if you let any mishap befall them, I cut off your ears for you!—It is my sword I am asking for; *diantre,* who has hidden it for me? My pistols, who has stolen them? To arms! Fly, my loves——"

His wife sat down in the middle of the room and folded her hands in her lap.

"Your sword, Don Hilario," she told him quietly, "is where you put it the last time; on the high shelf where the children couldn't get at it. Your pistols you hid, also, at the bottom of the old trunk. As to flying, have we wings like a seagull? It is nearly dark, it is cold and wet, it is a dreary long ride to the Rancho del Rey. Moreover, the ships have not even come to anchor yet. In the morning we shall see; to-night we remain here."

"But——" exclaimed Don Hilario.

"Virginia Luisa," said her mother, "run, get your papa his weapons. Then he will go to the *presidio,* and be among the first gentlemen to respond to the call which our governor makes in the king's name. Then, you and I will plan things here."

"I go, but I return!" cried Don Hilario, and, with a final embrace, waving his sword, he was off at a run to the *presidio* gate.

Virginia Luisa's eyes were shining; how one lived at a moment like this! How brave and splendid her papa was! What a shivery, yet delicious thrill was in the air! She, too, began to flutter about, here, there and everywhere, tingling with excitement.

"Come, child," said her mother. "There will be much for us to do. The men shout and shoot off their guns and beat their drums at a time like this; but you will see that we women have to use our heads. We are safe here until morning; by then we must be ready for anything. Even for flight at midnight if it comes to that. Run over to Señora Marquina's house; run, too, to Doña Guadalupe; tell them that all the ladies are meeting here in our home to plan together. Run, child!"

Out into the gathering dripping dusk ran Virginia

Luisa, her lacy mantilla floating after her, to burst into the confusion reigning in the homes of her mother's friends. Meanwhile, in her own kitchen, Señora de la Fuente had summoned her little army of Indian servants and, sternly silencing their jabberings, set them into orderly activity. Two dashed off to the near-by corrals to saddle all the horses; to hold them in instant readiness all night if need be. Others carried boxes, already packed, out into the yard, piling them in the two *caretas* there. Then they ran for the oxen, yoked them, and were off and away, lumbering and creaking, to join the procession of other home-made vehicles bound to the comparative security of the king's *rancho*. Then fires were lighted and pots made of coffee and chocolate, while meats were rewarmed.

"If it comes to fighting," said Señora de la Fuente, "men are always braver when they are well fed. These poor fellows, racing off to their guns, would forget all night to eat a mouthful!"

When, on her second errand, Virginia Luisa came flying down to the gate of the *presidio*, she found her way barred by the guard.

"It is I, Señorita de la Fuente," she told them. "For a word with His Excellency."

The lances which had been smartly crossed before her were lifted; the soldiers touched their hats.

"He has gone up into the church tower, to look out across the bay with his own eyes, señorita."

She hurried on. How she thrilled and thrilled again. Here she was in a bristling military camp, and here all hearts beat with hers in a hot love for this California of theirs.

Within the square, extending the lengths of the four

sides, were the presidial buildings, their outer walls identical with the wall of the *presidio*, their inner fronts presenting a long corridor maintained on pillars of rough-hewn trees. Here and there to these pillars were tied the horses, saddled since the first alarm. Knots of men stood ready, the soldiers of Monterey. The flash of a scarlet coat yonder, a broad bright sash there, the red and green of ribbons tying back the long hair, some brave display of silver buckles upon some few of those who still possessed them. A sprinkling of gold lace, worn, alas! and tarnished, but suddenly invested by the hour with its dash of jauntiness; three-cornered hats jostling a motley of low-crowned, broad-brimmed sombreros; English muskets with fresh charges rammed home, full cartridge boxes, cavalry pistols and the dull gleam of steel. And in another quarter, what was left of those reinforcements which had not been dispersed during the last few days, a little band of Indian archers, neophytes from one of the missions, each with his black beady eyes, his tall bow, and his full quiver.

The church stood at the end of the square, its tower affording the best lookout station. How many an hour eyes straining from there had looked out across the bay for those ships which now came at last! The girl went through the narrow doorway and hastened up the steep stairway.

Governor Sola, standing here alone, turned quickly.

"You, señorita! But you should already be leaving this place! Nothing is sure——"

"My mother," she panted, "will not go until the very last. She bids me tell you that many of the other ladies are meeting at our house. Our soldiers must be

fed, and she is preparing food for them there; it is so near the *presidio* and *castillo,* both. She will send our servants with supper to those who cannot leave their posts. At your convenience, Your Excellency, you will dine at our house? Or mama will send you something?"

Sola, who had done soon with storming and was now the cool, calm Lieutenant-Colonel not unused to situations like the present, surprised her with his little good-humored chuckle. He even patted her hand in his big one as he said:

"Ah! your mother; she is a wonderful lady, señorita. Her daughter, too. Angels, that is what our ladies of California are. You give us something glorious to draw a sword for. Thank your mother who thinks of everything. Presently, a few at a time, my brave fellows will march across to her door. I myself have no wish and no time for food. If, later, there should be occasion, I, too, will come."

Her errand done she looked, as he had been looking, out to sea, upon thick, low fog, broken a little here and there by a light, variable wind, dissipated by brief, chill showers, closing in again.

"The ships do not come yet?" she asked softly.

"A sentinel comes in every ten minutes from the Point of Pines," he told her. "I do not think that they will attack before to-morrow; it grows dark so fast. Tell your mother and the others that they may remain until I tell them they must go. But all must have horses saddled so that—— Ah! Look; see there, señorita!"

In a certain spot the fog seemed to thicken as about a concentrated nucleus of itself. Slowly, from the

quality of heavy vapor this spot grew into tangible solidity. It came on almost imperceptibly, seeming to inch across the dark waters. It took form, a black hulk growing larger, looming darker, nearer, more sinister.

"The black frigate!" cried Sola.

He whirled and ran down the steep stairway. The girl for the moment did not stir. She stood, scarcely breathing, staring out there, fascinated. Below she could hear the governor shouting commands.

Out yonder there was a splash; she could see it through the fog which had parted as though opening gatewise to the vessel's advance. The *Santa Rosa* had let go her anchor. She could see, too, a great crowd of men on board; could hear the wild, confused clamor of voices, a medley of tongues. The ship's sides seemed fairly to bristle with guns.

She recalled words she had overheard: here in Monterey there were but eight cannon all told, six- and eight-pounders. And some of them were so ancient and outworn as to be useless. She shivered suddenly, all thrill of adventure fled.

The slow, thick fog shut in again; the buccaneer craft was but a vague ghostly presence. Yet the voices came across the hidden water, yelling, jeering, eager voices. She remembered those others there in the little cove, those whom Captain Cavalier had held back from her. Where was Captain Cavalier now? Were those out there truly his friends, his kind, those of the evil, mocking voices?

She, too, turned and sped away from the church tower, hastening down the steps, half falling.

CHAPTER X

Captain Cavalier crouched lower in the darkness. An inner glee warmed the heart within him, though his body grew goose-fleshed with the damp cold. High luck, to have found these two together and followed them here; to have caught some hint at their plottings. Already one of them had the oars in his hand; a gentle shove was all that was needed to set the little rowboat afloat.

"I tell you, Nick Vara," said that pleasant and almost girlish musical voice of Sir Harry Hawk in the best of good humors, "I know this Frenchy, Bouchard, like a brother. He'll throw his arms about the two of us when he has your news—with me to vouch for it, remember! And he'll be the first to see the advantage of having my twenty fellows already ashore here. Come, man; my throat's aching for the hot rum that goes with a warm welcome."

"Your men?" asked Vara. From his voice one knew how he was plucking at his side-whisker; how he was frowning. "You can hold them to heel a few hours longer?"

Sir Harry laughed affably.

"You have seen, friend Vara! They'll not rebel again. Dick o' Boston was the only man of them all whom I've ever had to watch; and where is poor Dick now? He's done in and done brown," he chuckled. "Aye, all's shipshape there."

"You left them in the wood? They'll not stir until you command?"

"I left them in no such place," returned Sir Harry Hawk coolly. "Do you think I want them regretting that crazy Cavalier again? I left them, rather, snug and cosey between four walls. Down in that little shanty of Uncle—that half-shop, half-dive—I believe the fellow's a dealer in contraband of all sorts——"

"Tio Armenta's!" gasped Vara. "What folly, man!"

"Aye, Uncle Armenta's; that's the place. Folly, say you? What of it? A dash of folly is what my gentlemen must have to keep them as we want them. And there's no danger; the town's as good as deserted, the birds that want plucking are within the *presidio,* and only a sentinel goes up and down here and there. Let one of them stick his nose in at Uncle Armenta's, and there's one less for us to clear out of the way when Bouchard gives the word."

"And old Armenta? Dead?"

"Who, then, would serve my gentlemen their liquor and hand them their cards? Oh, they'll keep the old fellow alive the night through; unless he drops dead of terror. But come; I begin to shiver here."

"Then shiver," growled Vara, "another twenty minutes. I told Sola I was doing a bit of reconnoitring on my own; but he will be looking for me. Wait me here; I report to him, make the great dunce my excuses again and come back to you."

"If you must," sighed the other. "Only I warn you if you keep me overlong you swim out to Bouchard. I'm belly-full of your lessons in patience."

Vara hastened away. Sir Harry Hawk began pacing back and forth along the beach, swinging his arms to keep warm, humming a little unsavory song. Captain

Cavalier fell to pondering; he had a full quarter of an hour before Vara's return, ample time to shape his own plans and to take the first step toward carrying them out.

Dick o' Boston dead and Harry Hawk once more in undisputed command; well, after all, it was to be expected. And Nicolas Vara, the governor's trusted friend, hand in glove with the invaders? H'm, that was news. Or rather the first assurance confirming very lively suspicions.

Vara made haste. Challenged by the guard, admitted, he was closeted with His Excellency not above ten minutes. While seeming to make his report, it was really Vara who asked most of the questions. He knew to a nicety what was planned, what had been done.

"So the De la Fuentes remain at their house?" he queried.

"With horses saddled, like some other ladies. Under command from me to flee at the first signal of danger. With them that little love-bird of yours, Vara. She were best wed soon, eh? Her mother agrees; she is scandalized by what the girl has done. She swears that, with all her wild doings, the time will come soon when no man will care to marry her. Now's your chance, as soon as we grow settled here again."

"I'll wed her to-night," said Vara, staring hard.

Sola shrugged.

"If it can be done, do so and welcome. But I fail to see how."

Vara rose.

"I'm off for a word with her and her mother. You will understand, Don Pablo, that I am uneasy for

them? Have I your permission to absent myself from you for an hour or two?"

"Go, my friend," said Sola. "Only, I'll count upon you at the first alarm. Good fortune attend you."

Vara went out, and though he turned up the slope toward the De la Fuente home, altered his course as soon as he disappeared from the eyes of the sentry and hurried again to the beach. When near enough to make out Sir Harry Hawk's cloak fluttering against the veil of the dark, he cried sharply:

"Get her afloat, man. I've much to do now before day."

"Hist!" came a cautious whisper. "Silence is best, Nick Vara. I heard a noise just now; there's another than ourselves about."

"The more need for haste," returned Vara, his voice lowered, staring about and seeing no one.

Their four hands shoved the little boat out into shallow water; standing in the ebb and flow, they got in, Vara in the stern, the other bending to the oars. Like an ebon chip on a sea of pitch the rowboat carried them out into the bay.

Just before them, half a mile out, lay the nearest of the ships. As it swung idly at anchor now and then a lantern gleamed faintly. Otherwise all was dark. Vara brooded, a man absorbed with all the plot and counterplot bred of the hour and his own treachery. After the rougher water was behind them and their craft steadied somewhat to the more quiet bay outside the surf, the tune which Sir Harry Hawk had crooned on the beach was wafted back to him in gay whistled snatches.

"You're a merry devil," growled Vara.

But he had no answer. The oars were plied with fresh vigor, silence descended upon both men. Each to-night had his opportunity offered him, his hazards ahead.

They drew close to the dark hull of the frigate. Vara cupped his hands about his mouth and shouted:

"Ahoy, there! Is Captain Bouchard on board?"

A man came to the rail, leaning over.

"Who goes?" he challenged.

"Friends," answered Vara. "On urgent business with Captain Bouchard."

The fellow above at the rail hesitated. Then he disappeared, but was back in an instant with a lantern. Its light revealed his own face, and seldom did any light limn against suddenly pierced dark, a face which belonged more properly to the dark itself; the face of some island native, a dash of negro blood crying loudly in a confusion of many bloods and none of the lot the sort to set any man bragging. A black face gashed by an enormous animal mouth, dotted by small gleaming eyes, scarred and pitted and twisted.

Others of his fellows began crowding about him, demanding:

"Who is it? What do they want?"

They had spoken, like Vara, in Spanish. Now a breezy voice in English called out:

"Ahoy there. What are you up to?"

"They want Bouchard."

The voice in English, as its owner leaned outward on the rail, called down:

"I'm in command here, Lieutenant Peter Corney. What word do you bring?"

"What does he say?" asked Vara.

For answer he was given the short whispered admonition:

"Tell him you don't speak English. That you've private word for Bouchard."

"Curse your whispers, Harry Hawk," growled Vara. But aloud he did as advised, again demanding Bouchard.

"Well, then, go to Bouchard and the devil take your private business," retorted Corney and turned away. He had seen by the swiftly lowered lantern that there were but two men in a crazy boat bobbing below; no menace to him. And besides, he was off to bed.

"Where are we to find Captain Bouchard?" yelled Vara.

The evil-visaged islander grinned and spat and then answered:

"This is the *Santa Rosa.* Captain Bouchard is aboard the *Argentina.* Where? Somewhere on the bay! Now, tell us about things on shore. Fine clothes for us? Full barrels and fat chests of doubloons? Pretty maids and rich old dons for ransom?"

"Down with Spain!" Don Nicolas gave him for answer. The half-naked islander laughed and pulled in his lantern. The little row boat turned and sped away, heading still further to sea, questing the *Argentina* and Captain Bouchard.

"There she lies yonder," said Vara presently. "You'll mark the black blot of her."

He had a grunt for answer; the prow turned a bit, and with oars plied vigorously again they made straight for the black bulk of the vessel. A lantern appeared, a very glow-worm through the mist. They pulled

alongside. Again Vara trumpeted through his hands, demanding Bouchard.

It was Captain Bouchard himself who, chancing to be on deck, came to the ship's side and gave back an answer. A rich, mellow voice modulated to a certain cultured civility of which this Captain Bouchard was master; a graceful show of refinement which he could don or doff like a cloak.

"Who asks for Hipolyte Bouchard? You see him here at your service, monsieur."

"You are Captain Bouchard?" asked Vara eagerly. The words had come down to him in French, yet even so he caught their sense. "I speak only Spanish——"

"*Bueno,*" retorted Bouchard lightly. "I will speak your Spanish with you, señor. What may it be?"

"I bring news from on shore. Full information, details of everything! I am with you, señor!" And as before, now again and as bitterly, did he cry: "Down with Spain!"

"Oho! So the Spaniards here in California, like other Spaniards south, stand ready to haul down the lion of Castile?"

"Some few," explained Vara. "Others, the most of them, are all for Ferdinand, tyranny, and folly. But, if you will receive me on board, I shall tell you everything."

"Who is your companion, Señor Rebellious Spaniard?" queried Bouchard.

"One whom you know well, señor; one who will vouch for me. It is a gentleman of fortune who names himself Sir Harry Hawk!"

Again Captain Bouchard said "Oho!" and then laughed softly.

"Little Harry Hawk, is it? Now, by the wooden sabre of King Henry himself, I'd never guessed it; for I never knew him hold his tongue so long a time! He'll bring word from Gentleman Charlie Calvert himself?—Ho, there; a ladder overboard. Sharply does it, my hearties."

The ladder was lowered and with the boat tethered to its dangling end its two occupants went up the ship's side, Vara thrusting to the fore. On deck, in what small uncertain light fell from a smoke-blackened lantern, he made his bow and sought to see what he could of this Captain Bouchard who might stand to-night in the position to make or mar the fortunes of one Nicolas Vara.

All that he could see was a short, wiry little man in an enormous hat, the brim pinned sharply back at one side with a pin that shone with the purest of diamond lights; a fall of lace at sleeve and collar; a flash of silver buckles; a rich hilt thrust forward from under a loose cloak; and the merest hint of a face with black pointed beard and fiercely upthrust moustaches.

"You are most welcome, Sir Spaniard," said Bouchard, his own bow of the primmest. "I should be glad of your news. To begin with—who the devil are you?"

Now he became sharp; all sheer, direct business.

"Don Nicolas Vara, señor, at your service."

"Spanish, of course?"

"Never, señor! Mexican and a son of liberty. But some few months from Mexico, where I fought with the *insurgentes*. Captured there, señor, accused of being a spy, ordered shot. I escaped and came here.

Here, señor, I have been accepted as a friend by none less than the governor himself."

There, in a word, he had Bouchard's interest. For, once he had determined on striking a blow, this Hipolyte Bouchard had a great fondness for carrying out his affair with all possible craft; it mattered not at all how much blood was spilled on the other side, but he was a stout advocate of conservation of his own forces.

"Now, this is excellent," is what he said. But it was obvious that his eagerness to learn anything he could was no greater than his alertness. Very bluntly he added: "Before I trust a man, señor, one who comes to betray his friends, I must know something about him."

Vara, expecting this and having made his own preparations, remained unmoved.

"Of course, señor. That is why I have brought one to vouch for me, one whom you can trust, since you know that he makes common cause with you." He turned toward his companion, saying confidently: "You will quiet Captain Bouchard's fears, señor? You will tell him—everything?"

And here is the answer which Don Nicolas got in a ringing voice, the very first sound of which made him start back like a man stabbed:

"Everything? None gladder than I to tell you, Hipolyte Bouchard! The man's a dirty, contemptible, treacherous hound, who would rather knife a friend in the back than take a swig of honest rum!"

Vara was speechless. Mind you, this was at a time when rank superstition stalked up and down everywhere among men and was day and night like a ghostly thing at many an elbow. He saw Sir Harry Hawk's

cloak fluttering against the rail—but it burst upon him that the man in the cloak was Captain Cavalier!

But Bouchard, startled as he too was, was quick to demand:

"What fiend's foolishness is this you treat me to? You tell me this is Harry Hawk? Don't I know Gentleman Charlie Calvert, Captain Cavalier that men grow to call him?—Ho, there!" he shouted, and a dozen barefooted sailors rushed forward. "Watch me these two well until I have an explanation out of them. Shoot down the first to lift hand or stir foot."

Vara stood as he was, staring. He had not uttered a word, nor is it likely that he had begun to think. Under a shock like his, mental processes are paralyzed. It was in effect as if he had actually seen one man turn into another.

Captain Cavalier, having spoken, also kept his place, right hand on dagger hilt, left hand on the rail behind him, poised it would seem, lifted a little upon his toes, ready for anything.

Bouchard, having barked out his order and seen bristling alacrity in the obedience of the semicircle of his wild devils who started forward, gave a sudden fierce upthrust to both ends of his needle-pointed moustaches, and then sought the shortest way to come to the straight of matters.

"An it please you, gentlemen," he said curtly, "we shall have a word or two explaining how I am bid to hearken to Harry Hawk when it's Charlie Calvert and not little Harry at all?"

Here, the first sign that Vara lived and was not a dead man erect, was heard a little click of his teeth. But as for a word of explanation, it could hardly be

looked for from him! In truth, he was no less eager than Bouchard himself to know.

Hence it fell to Captain Cavalier, the only man who knew, to tell the tale. Which he did gaily, as one who enjoyed the recital.

"To begin with, Monsieur Hipolyte, my rascals lost me my ship some weeks ago. The rats in a panic went overboard, leaving me alone to think of any small salvaging. One knows if he was not born to be drowned, eh? So I was blown to sea on a leaky, yawing hull; blown north, too, along a shore of sharp crags. Yet, though I lost my ship in the end, I saved a life which is very precious to me; as also, with half a dozen lengths of rope, a certain chest worthy some small risks. Thereafter, with an adventure here and there which we shall leave for some golden hour over a bottle together, I found me my half-starved vagabonds again. That little Harry Hawk, whom this black dog," and he tipped his head coolly toward the motionless Vara, "expected to have at hand to vouch for him here, had assured himself that his master was dead and himself the man for his master's boots! In a word he was Captain Sir Harry Hawk, God save the mark! I had the pleasure of setting him down, though but for the time; I smote him fair between the crafty blue little eyes of him and left him cold."

Here Vara, who already had begun to stir, found his tongue.

"Hear me, Captain Bouchard——"

"I hear one at a time," said Bouchard savagely. "Have done, Calvert."

"This double-dealing Mexican gentleman," went on Captain Cavalier, "has allied himself to Harry Hawk.

Birds of a feather, you know, friend Hipolyte! Just now the two, plotting treason, stood on the beach, planning to make you this visit. The Mexican stepped away for a few minutes. Less time would have been a-plenty for my business with his companion."

"You murdered him?" demanded Vara, beginning to understand. "Put a knife into his back, eh?"

"Now, would you believe," cried Captain Cavalier, his head to one side. "I never thought of that—not being of your turn of mind, Señor Vara! In my clumsier Anglo-Saxon fashion I took somewhat more pains in the matter and, I'll admit, failed of the clean-cut result your native genius would have come to. Humanity, I fear, makes a fool of me; and I'd abhor almost as much to thrust a knife into merry little Harry Hawk as to have to put an end to the sufferings of any dog of mine gone mad. No; I merely trussed him up nicely and left him comfortable in a bed of rock and sea-shells. I'll not say I did not bruise him; yet murder him I did not."

"You are talking to me, sir," said Bouchard. "Remember that. I am not concerned with your private quarrels; I still fail to understand this theatric appearance before me."

Captain Cavalier fell to staring at Bouchard now. Dim and uncertain as the light was it was sufficient to show a certain quality of bearing in the young Virginian; and it was not that of a man who knuckles under to any.

"Hipolyte Bouchard," he said sternly, "I come here a visitor, of my own will; one free captain presenting himself to another. You will also remember that!"

Bouchard swore fluently in strange French oaths.

Yet, having thus relieved himself, he spoke a trifle more gently, though perhaps with an added mocking subtlety.

"Captain Cavalier, you shall teach me my manners. Your visit, though uninvited, overwhelms me. Will it please you, sir, to proceed? Your tale is delicious, my curiosity as deep as the sea."

"He came," cried Vara, "to fill you with lies."

"I came," said Captain Cavalier equably, "because the opportunity was irresistible. Also, to tell you what a traitorous hound this fellow is. And finally, to advise with you, speaking of conditions on shore, of the attack to be made and of my own part in the same."

"Ah," said Bouchard. "And your part, monsieur?"

"I'll lead the attack," was the cool rejoinder. "I am the man for it, as we both know. You want the person of the governor; well, you shall have him and in short time, and the fat ransom thereafter, if you give me my way."

"And you?" queried Bouchard, knowing him well. "You will want some little thing of your own, perhaps?"

Captain Cavalier laughed pleasantly.

"How you read me, monsieur! There is the *presidio* and within it certain spoils, doubtless. I want none of that. There are the warehouses outside the walls, stocked as you will find them; I want none of them. There are some Spanish jewels, it may be; certainly some fine if somewhat worn Spanish cloaks and gold laces and silver buckles; none of these do I covet. There are barrels of good red California wine, casks of very noble brandy; they are yours. There are the extra-mural habitations, better than a score of resi-

dences of these hidalgos; take them all—but one! And there we have it, my portion of the booty. Give me one home only and all that it contains. There you see me content."

"No!" shouted Vara. "No! That house falls to me! Look you, señor," he cried to Bouchard, flinging out his arms with a certain intense and dramatic grace, "I am the man who gives you all California! You come to-day; I have been here, working toward this one thing, a full year. Where this brawling Cavalier guesses a little, I know everything. Here lies California; she is yours to take, to rend and ravish and loot from end to end. It is I who can show you the way. And it is I who ask that one house only."

Now the two of them set Bouchard wondering. What might that house contain? He put the question promptly. And it was Vara this time, springing forward, who gave him the swift answer.

"It contains a girl, señor! One girl only, among the hundreds in California. But this one is my affianced bride."

"You lie," Captain Cavalier told him hotly.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" Now Bouchard, meaning to come quite to the bottom of things, was all for peace between them. "Señor Vara," he went on, "you show me something of your heart to-night. You are not the man to love any other, any one maid on earth, so well as you love yourself. Why, then, this passionate demand? Why do you set so much store in one pair of eyes?"

Vara could be as coolly and deliberately direct as any, when he saw the need.

"Then I shall tell you. You come to strike a blow

here and to go on. Whether in the end liberty triumphs or King Ferdinand, whom God curse, sits on secure upon his throne, you reck nothing. But for me, it is different. When you sail away, I remain here. Let tyranny fall, I am secure. Let matters go the other way—and they brand me traitor! Is that clear, señor?"

"Very clear. What next?"

"We come to that one house—and its content, señor. I wed a certain maid; I ally myself with a certain family, the most powerful within some hundreds of miles of this little Monterey, señor; the proudest—and the most loyal to Spain. Ah, you see it? Should all my other plans fail, which I do not believe they will, yet I save myself."

"A foot in either camp," nodded Bouchard. "Well, that's plain enough. Yet, what matters all this to me?"

"This, señor: if I win, I become like a king here! Spanish dominion is dead; I set my foot upon it; I place myself in its stead. I remember my friend Captain Bouchard. He has ever a free port of entry; he has rich gifts; he has many a mission and *rancho* and village to plunder. All this when we win. Should we lose?" He shrugged. "Fortunes of war, señor. But in any case it costs you nothing—just a girl, whom you have not even seen."

"So that is it?" mused Captain Cavalier. "Well, I've seen that the devil himself can speak by the book to come to the devil's desire."

Bouchard fell to pondering. Presently he looked sharply at Captain Cavalier.

"You are a bold blade, Charlie Calvert," he said suddenly, "to present yourself before me to-night. You will not have forgotten our last meeting?"

"Who but a bold blade need present himself before

the bold Bouchard?" asked Cavalier lightly. "Nor am I the man to forget any conversations I have had with you, monsieur. We quarrelled, I believe? But then you and I have, in our time, quarrelled with many. You vowed to swing me high, given the so sweet opportunity? Well, but the opportunity has never offered. Now? Not so, monsieur. Under my cloak I have a hand; in my hand a pistol; in the pistol a charge of dry powder; on top of that, since it is a double-barrelled affair, a chunky leaden pellet atop each charge. Right now, thrusting forth my cloak as you'd see, were the light better, that pistol looks toward your heart."

Now here was more than boldness; rash and reckless impudence. Yet also, for a man as quick of wit as Bouchard and as steadfast in pursuance of a set purpose, was a quiet voice in his ears saying:

"Yonder, the bold devil, is the very man to lead the attack on Monterey. There is always the time, after victory, to arrange personal trifles."

So he pondered on. Here before him were two men, either of whom might serve admirably just now. Not both; there was no reconciling such cat-and-dog animosity as those two nourished. He could make use of one. The other, with things as they were, he had better make an end of speedily.

He considered Vara. A stranger, a spy, one to betray those to whom he pretended friendship; a slippery customer. Yet one who no doubt, as he had said, knew to the last detail California's mood, her defenses, her wealth. A man of ambition; one who, with good luck, might go far; one who might be of service both now and later on.

He considered Charlie Calvert. Young, hot-blooded,

headlong. Just the man to lead such an attack as Bouchard planned. A man whose word was as good as gold; a hard hitter, but with no trickery in him. In the way of being a private enemy—yet that affair could wait along with many another.

"I believe that one of you gentlemen comes most opportunely," said Bouchard. "The other would have fared a deal better had he remained on shore." He paused and took snuff. He was on the very verge of a decision; yet, always fond of deliberate caution before it was too late to readjust, he availed himself of his last chance to make sure that he had overlooked no iota of the slightest weight in this rather nice balance which was occupying him. He even sighed. Here were two personalities, utterly unlike and antagonistic; yet he could have wished to have served himself with both. He tapped and drummed upon his snuff-box. Then, with a swift gesture, he put it away.

"Gentlemen——"

Alongside oars were heard furiously driven, slipping in the oar-locks, splashing awkwardly and mightily. A curse for clumsiness, a mutter of impatience, and then a voice shouting:

"Ahoy, there. A word with Captain Bouchard!"

Bouchard, without moving, called back:

"Does all California come uninvited to visit me? Who calls?"

"Corney. I'm Peter Corney," was the rejoinder. "Half a dozen fellows with me. Harry Hawk among them, Captain, and he has a mouthful of news. Have you Captain Cavalier with you?"

"Aye," answered Bouchard. "What of it?"

"Harry Hawk here will tell you. Best hold him

tight and watch him, Captain. His band has turned on him; they say he has betrayed them, going over to the Californians for the sake of a pair of eyes and ankles——"

In a flash, needing far less to drag one scale down and elevate its rival, Bouchard's mind was made up. With a nimble leap he sprang aside, and shouted as he sprang:

"Shoot me that fellow, Cavalier!"

But Captain Cavalier's hand all the while was on the rail, and Cavalier himself ready for anything. Amid a rattling volley of pistol shots he went overboard. There was no time now for one of those gestures he loved so well; no time even for one of his swift retorts. And, for once in his haphazard life, there was little grace in the manner of his departure. But, a better thing in its stead, there was an almost incredible swiftness.

"Make sure of him, you fools," roared Bouchard, back at the ship's side and peering down into the thick dark. "You, Peter Corney, run him down. Give me an end of this cursed Captain Cavalier."

They had heard the splash of the body diving head first and turned their boat toward the spot. They even found Sir Harry Hawk's cloak floating nearby, caught upon an oarblade. They salvaged the cloak and had the satisfaction of making out what appeared to be a couple of bullet holes in the fabric; but they found no Captain Cavalier, dead or alive.

Other boats were manned in haste. It was a full hour before Bouchard disgustedly gave orders to pull back to the *Argentina*. By the time the last boat returned, Captain Cavalier, spent and shivering and blue

with cold, was crawling ashore. His teeth made such a lively din, chattering away like dice rattled in a cup, that he feared lest some prowling sentinel might hear them. And, for a moment at least, his disgust was no whit less than Bouchard's.

"Captain Cavalier, outstanding jackass of all the ages," he told himself when he had breath to mutter and strength to stand. "First, I lose me my ship; next, I throw away my leadership of my men; they're Harry Hawk's now as never before. Then I stir up fresh enmity in Frenchy Bouchard. I've him threatening me from the sea; I've all California to landward, yearning to stretch hemp with me. On top of all that I'm as wet as a drowned rat who might be snug and warm, my powder's soaked and useless—and with a fight soon to come off, I'm as much out of it as if I were asleep in Richmond. Bah!"

Bad as all this was, there remained even worse. In the dark he had made somewhat blindly for shore, and now his was the urgent task of coming upon the exact spot where he had trussed up little Harry Hawk an hour ago. His reason of the most cogent. For, when rowing with Vara and appearing in Harry Hawk's cloak, he had worn little else. The temptation to play this trick on Nicolas Vara and to strive to come to certain ends through Bouchard, had been irresistible; yet all the while he had fully understood that he ran the very likely risk of being obliged to swim for his life. Therefore he had left his boots and the major part of his clothing, rolled in a bundle and dropped by a big rock; even his rapier, of whose friendly companionship he was very fond, he had at the last moment left sticking in the sand.

Now, while his whole body jerked and danced with cold, he sought high and low for his garments. He appeared to have found the very spot where he had left them; there was the big rock which he thought to remember. Yet the garments failed to reward the search of his shaking fingers.

Thinking that perhaps the sword, thrust into the smooth sand, might prove easier of location, he turned away from the rocks and made his search for it; find it and he'd have his bearings corrected. And within five minutes he found it. So, then, he had looked in the right place for his boots and cloak—and they were gone!

"That seven times accursed Harry Hawk!" he told himself in a cold fury. "I've ever had the suspicion the rat had eyes for the dark. A nasty bit of spite, to kick a man's clothes into the Pacific."

He caught up sword and pistols and conceded that he was in high good luck to have these left him. Thereafter, feeling that else he would stiffen and cramp and drop, done in, he began running up and down along the wet beach. As he ran he recalled certain words he had overheard between Hawk and Vara; how Hawk had left his men in a cosey place where they revelled in food and drink. The very thought of a stiff draught of California's strong brandy put the heart back in him.

With determination swiftly taken, he spun about and ran on toward Monterey. As he raced along his blood began to flow warm within him again. Of a sudden, touched in the very quick of that humorous heart of him, seeing his own plight as that of another, he began to laugh.

"California," he chuckled, the while his teeth per-

formed their lively clicking dance over which as yet he was allowed no control, "the fame of your fine hospitality has travelled far overseas. What can you refuse a poor devil in my plight? Look at me with kind and sorrowful eyes! You can refuse—nothing. *Ergo,* you will give me—everything!"

Thus he cheered himself. He was done with one episode, therefore it was time he turned to another. Already his mind grew thick with plans. He ran more swiftly; thus despite the wind that cut like a knife, he dispelled the worst of the chill.

"I owe you jest for jest, little Harry Hawk," he meditated as he scurried along. "And, may it go hard with me if I do not give you the answer to your little prank."

CHAPTER XI

His lost hat a jaunty memory, his boots sunk deep in the Pacific, where doubtless Harry Hawk had hurled them to vent his spleen, his sword gripped in a shivering hand, with foes at his back and foes in front, never certainly had even this Captain Cavalier been in sorrier plight. And yet, such was the man, he vowed he'd live to make of the night's adventure a merry tale for his grandchildren to tell. There are those philosophic souls who maintain, not without a show of reason, that when matters arrive at so evil a pass that they can grow no worse, then they are bound to better themselves. For there is no stability in the flux called fortune which, like the restless ocean, must ever be astir, either to ebb or to flow. Captain Cavalier, shining example of this most optimistic group, lost no time in lending his own hand toward an improvement of conditions.

He realized full well that at any moment in this utter dark he might thrust his nose, so to speak, against the nose of a sentinel. That the traitor Vara had been able to launch a boat with no challenge could be explained only in the fact of his position in Sola's regard; doubtless he had taken all precautions, sent the sentinel off on some fool's errand; or even taken the boat openly under pretense of reconnoitring. That Captain Cavalier had swum ashore unnoted was not remarkable; but that he might go running up and down the beach all night without drawing a musket ball was not to be expected. Therefore, bent now upon his business, he proceeded with a degree of caution.

"Most embarrassing, I'll be bound," he even chuckled as he stepped along on his bare toes, "to be apprehended in this costume of mine; what an undignified figure I must cut if haled thus before His Excellency! I'd blush to be either shot or hanged so. 'Tis plain I must come by something exhilarating to pour down into an interior where it feels as though little sharp pieces of ice were forming; next, some additional wardrobe, warm and dry."

Those whom their fellows brand as foolhardy are frequently only tip-toe individuals, swift of thought and quick of act, who, while rushing upon an obstacle or into danger, see quite clearly what lies beyond and how it may be come upon. Here was one of the order, as unhesitant in shaping a campaign as in giving thought to a desire. To be sure, he based plan and wish alike upon a fine confidence that for him Misfortune stood ever ready to metamorphose herself into her smiling, sunny alter-ego, Miss Fortune. At moments like this one he had to cheer and comfort him his most excellent motto: the wheel which had brought him low would be carrying him upward again without delay, such a speedily whirring wheel it was; he had but to snatch swiftly and full-handedly as he went.

A barefooted man on wet sand, with foamy ripples whispering about his feet, makes no sound for even his own ears to hear. But a booted sentinel on harder soil, it matters not how guardedly he stir, may be heard some steps away by any who is alert. At a rocky point Captain Cavalier escaped detection without great difficulty; a hundred yards further along he avoided it the second time and more narrowly. And now he was forced to forsake the edge of the bay as he neared that

new battery where the young Californian corporal and his men were. Thus he approached the quiet village.

He found a familiar shallow gully with a trickle of water sluicing along in its bottom; this he followed some little distance, knowing that it would bring him to the squat hut known as Uncle Armenta's place.

"I burn with curiosity," he told himself, and shivered by way of contrast, "like any cat. To know if Harry Hawk spoke truth when he said he had quartered his men here. A bolder thing than one would look for in so devious and crafty a little man. Yet safe, perhaps, in its very boldness, as I have found might be the case in sundry adventurings."

Just before him, like a black box, rose Tio Armenta's hut. The place was as dark as a well. If any within had a light, no gleam of it shone outside. But that might easily be; the walls were of thick adobe bricks; the two windows were small, and could be darkened with a blanket or two, as could any crack about the door. So he stood listening a long while. Once he thought that he heard what might have been a bottle neck against a cup; once a sound that might have been a jingling of coins; once a subdued shuffling. Yet so faint was each that it was a suspicion rather than certainty of any noise.

At last, however, came a most unmistakable sound. Almost at his side, too, as a man walking guardedly came about the corner of the building.

Captain Cavalier must do his thinking fast now. He could take to his heels, to be sure; but that brought him nowhere in the direction of bettering his plight. He might slip a sword through the fellow, but he had no fondness for stealthy murder, and besides, there'd

most likely be a hue and cry. If he could but be sure who came? A Californian sentinel? Or, more likely, one of his own former crew standing guard?

Once already to-night he had made a whisper his ally; for a whisper in the dark, in the proper articulation of confidence, assures the one for whose ears it is meant that here comes the one he had expected. And sheer inspiration visited him in his need. He recalled how Harry Hawk, commanding silence, had a favorite "*Hist!*" ever shaping his lips; and how, here in California, one on similar provocation said "*Chist!*" He hit, therefore, on a syllable which might serve had he to do with either camp, and gave sibilant utterance to a most non-committal:

"*—ist!*"

It worked like a charm.

"Is that you, Captain?"

Now, surely, already the wheel began to carry him up! That throaty voice belonged to none other than a certain ninny familiarly yclept Nosegay; him whom Captain Cavalier had last seen covering his unwieldy paunchiness with a priest's gown. As simple and thick-witted as any of the crew, and there was more than one of their number who was no mental colossus.

"*Hist—Nosegay!*"

"It's so cursed dark," grumbled Nosegay. "Is that you, Captain Hawk?"

Circumstances may force the need of a certain modicum of deceit, or at least may urge a man to refrain from disabusing another who chooses to deceive himself. Captain Cavalier, like the rest of us, sometimes indulged in the meticulous affair of splitting hairs. He held himself an honorable gentleman, one whose name

stood high in old Virginia, and must not be smudged by him even in this dark hole; in short, he was one who, offered a soft bed in exchange for a lie, would have chosen rather to sleep on the hard ground.

So he told no lie. It suited him, as also it somewhat amused him, to ask a question, telling nothing.

"Who the devil should I be?" He managed a savage impatience in the whisper. "Think I'm the governor, maybe? Or that mad Cavalier, perhaps? Or the King of Spain, or the Pope? Now, attend me, Nosegay. Are you listening, man?"

"Aye, aye, sir," rejoined Nosegay.

"All the crew's inside? According to orders?"

"Aye," grumbled the other. "Where I wish I was. It grows cursed cool out here."

"Cool, is it? Here, blockhead; lend me your hand."

The wondering Nosegay felt a bare, cold arm; a chest likewise cold and bare.

"You're as naked as a babe!" he muttered. "What——"

"Hist!" Captain Cavalier told him again. "I've had a devil's own time of it, but the tale need not be told now; you'll have it soon enough, and from other lips than mine!" He chuckled in anticipation. "I've had a swim in the wettest sea under the wet sky; and I'm of a mind to be both warm and dry."

"Aye, aye," nodded Nosegay. "That's in reason."

"And, while seeking fresh wardrobe, it suits my modest fancies, Nosegay, not to go displaying my lack thereof before the gaping world. Also, I would for the present remain where I stand, my own sentinel, and for reasons quite my own. Therefore, do you step inside and bring me what may be readily come by; the best

cloak to be borrowed, boots, sundry gentlemen's garments, and a full flask. If you can put your clever hands upon such raiment as may be deemed worthy him who wants it, you'll confer a kindness upon one who recalls such trifles gratefully. No filthy rags, remember. And a hat. Now, haste, man, and bid the others keep quiet and remain where they are."

"You give a man a large order," grumbled Nosegay.

"But readily filled, if you've your wits about you, in Tio Armenta's place," he got for airy rejoinder. "'Tis a smugglers' shop of sorts, and besides liquors you'll find such sundries as will serve. Speed, Nosey."

Nosegay thereupon shambled about the corner. He could be heard tapping faintly upon a door. There was a moment of silence, during which no doubt a light inside was hidden; then the cautious complaint of hinges.

Captain Cavalier danced up and down where he was, finding some five or ten minutes as long as most hours. But here at length returned the plodding Nosegay freighted with most welcome burden.

"A cloak like you said, Cap'n. Lucky for you, Uncle Armenta kept some of his goods close by; a pretty lot of contraband safe hid, as he thought. Well, I've robbed him his chests for you. Feel these boots, Cap'n; fine Cordovan; that's what. Here's a Spanish hat likewise; beaver with silver braid. And here's this and that of a most dainty hidalgo's apparel. Last and foremost, a flask, full to the top."

There was a merry little gurgle: Captain Cavalier had the flask, greeted it warmly, and in return was warmed. Then, with swift though numbed fingers, which must also serve him as eyes, he clothed himself.

It dawned on him that a man is only half a man until he is dressed properly; with a cloak once more on his shoulders, a fine pair of boots upon his feet, and a hat clapped atop his tangled curls, he was conscious of a tidal rush of satisfaction. Even to a broad sash, the color of which must for the present remain problematical, but which he trusted would prove rich scarlet or cerulean blue, he stood complete; he stuck pistols and dagger in it, and clapped Nosegay upon the shoulder.

"I do nicely thus, thanks to you and Uncle Armenta," he said contentedly. "Now, a bit of dry powder from your pouch, Nosegay."

"And now, what?" asked Nosegay, having complied.

After a second happy little gurgle he had for answer:

"You have remembered your orders?"

"What orders? Only to wait here, as we've done; to stand in readiness against your coming——"

"They're ready inside?"

"They make haste, knowing you have returned; they guzzle as fast as any man can, and fill to carry along what vessels they can find."

Captain Cavalier was thinking: how he owed Harry Hawk a bit of confusion. Further, that he might draw a certain relish from a dash of pure diablerie served out to these fellows here whom once he had captained. Most of all, how he might serve a most useful purpose, commingling business with pleasure, as it were. Putting a point to these meditations a little sound broke the silence; but whether chuckle or gurgle, Nosegay was never to know in his dull-witted life. Even while he resolved the matter, he had the whispered command:

"Hark you, Nosegay; and listen well: I hie me off

to a bit of unfinished business. As to you others, here is what you must do: leave this place immediately, knowing that I have had word with Frenchy Bouchard, and that preparations are afoot for the blow to be struck. From here you are to go cautiously, as there are sentinels all along the shore. Hence you must turn due east from here, angling back from the sea, for a full mile; then set your backs square upon Monterey for another full mile, which will bring you among the wooded hills. There are no sentinels there, so you can trot along at the double-quick. And, once in the hills, you can turn, angling again, seaward, so as to reach the unguarded beach within some three or four hours at most, and at a spot where none will suspect. There, await the boats from the craft in the harbor. And remember this, above all: unless Bouchard finds you where he wants you when the blow is struck, there'll be little loot to drop into your foolish mouths."

"It's cursed dark and cursed cold," grumbled Nosegay.

Captain Cavalier snatched him savagely by the arm.

"Yet you'll go!" he hissed into Nosegay's ear.

"Aye, we'll go. The boys are ready."

"Mind that you do. Silent and swift."

This time, seeing Nosegay shamble away in the dark, Captain Cavalier was off. Yet almost lingeringly, so would he have liked to have followed them; to have looked in on them later; while they plodded off through the gloom on this fool's errand; while they waited on the distant beach; when, perhaps, the sun rose and they began to understand, gropingly at first, that they had somehow been played upon. Also, he should have liked to remain here by the little wine-shop, against the

return of Harry Hawk! However, and with a sigh of regret at his lack of ubiquitousness, he went his way.

And that way? It led him straight toward a certain house near the wood's edge. He must find the way for a word into the pretty ear of Virginia Luisa. Here was an urge like a command laid on him, an urge which had been upon him when he dived overboard from the *Argentina.* Vara meant to have her; Harry Hawk had once evinced a lively and unlovely interest in her. Captain Cavalier swore that neither should so much as touch the tip of her little finger, now or ever.

Monterey was doomed. He knew that fact as well as he knew anything on earth. Therefore, Virginia Luisa must not linger. Any moment might bring the attack. Menaced as was Monterey, this girl stood in the greatest danger of them all. She were best in the saddle without delay.

He went boldly among the few scattered houses, dark and deserted, empty shells. If he met any here it would be one of the Californians, and he had at the tip of his tongue the words he would speak. He would demand, "Don Anastasio, have I found you then?" Or, "Is it you, Don Enrique?" Then he would demand the whereabouts of Don So-and-so, whisper vaguely of a message from His Excellency, and go on his way.

Warm and dry, as sprightly as a cricket once more, he turned his face toward the home nearest the wood, under the guns of the old *castillo;* Don Hilario's house where, as he had learned earlier in the evening, Monterey gathered all her fairest jewels of womanhood who scorned to flee at the first alarm. The place, at first, appeared as dark and deserted as all the others.

But as he drew nearer, to attentive ears there was the hushed hum of occupancy. Now and then, too, he heard a horse stir; with the shifting of hoofs came creak of leather or silvery jingle. Finally, he heard voices; just a low murmur within thick walls.

It must be close upon midnight. Yet they would be awake within, huddled together; tense to the slightest sound. There would be, too, servants about; going now and then among the horses, or to the outbuilding where the kitchen was, for a bite and a sip.

Here, most of all, would be Virginia Luisa.

Now, for the first time, having reached the very spot, he concerned himself soberly with the manner of coming at his desired interview. After the way of deeds to be accomplished, it had seemed easy from afar, yet tantalizingly difficult as one drew closer—downright impossible when right at hand.

"Impossible?" He fell to frowning; then began to taunt himself. "The little Corsican swears the word is not good French. I'll go further: it's neither decent English nor tolerable Spanish. It's rank Chinese, that's what it is. A tongue which I don't speak, and—I vow it from this instant—a tongue I'll ever refuse to learn. So, Captain Cavalier, have a pinch of snuff? Now, mine's the very prince of snuff-boxes, that with all its swimming has let in never a drop of salt water. That's better. And——"

He stared before him, snuff and snuff-box alike forgotten. A back door had opened, a subdued light illuminated its rectangle, a form appeared briefly outlined.

"And there's the lady herself! Nay, I've made the vow, and I'll never study the Chinese!"

CHAPTER XII

VIRGINIA LUISA, with the house door closed behind her, ran the few steps across the hard-packed back yard. Thus she came to another door, that of the near-by outbuilding, the kitchen. She opened this, was for an instant revealed in the dimmer glow of its threshold, and disappeared as this door closed behind her.

Captain Cavalier, with a sharp look here and there about him, followed swiftly. Come in his turn to the kitchen door, he stood still, listening. From within the only sounds to reach him, though he restrained his impatience to make reasonably sure, were of her light footfall hastening about whatever she did, followed by the fall and clatter of an earthen plate crashing to the floor and her little gasp and exclamation:

"Zas! Cataplúm!"

To his eager ears it was as much as to say:

"Enter! You find me alone, señor!"

Therefore and without more ado he opened the door softly, stepped as softly across the threshold and closed it after him.

So busy and so preoccupied was she that at first she did not notice him. There was something quite birdlike in the swiftness of her motions. She darted at the litter of fragments which her own careless hand had caused, snatched up a clumsy affair of a broom, which she applied with a pretty clumsiness of her own to sweep the pieces into a convenient corner. No more deft a soft pair of hands in all California for dainty sewing and embroidery; for knitting glorious silken

garters for her brothers, ornate affairs meant for display with silk and gold threads in fantastic flowerings. No more amazingly silly little hands anywhere when it was a matter of pots and pans and dishes, which any stupid Indian of the household would know would grow unpleasantly hot from sitting in the hot *hornilla.*

She nursed her finders, flung the débris as far as a sweep of a broom could send them, and made a figure which Captain Cavalier would have been content to admire for much longer than was to be allowed. It dawned on him that now, for the first time, he saw her dressed as he would have her always. There at the cove and in the forest she had appeared in her riding habit with her conical small-brimmed sugar loaf of a hat; with a handkerchief pinned under her chin; with her dainty person lost among yards of cloth. And now?

Ah, that captivating piquancy of the little señorita of *el año de los insurgentes!* Two soft, intriguing ringlets, the *balcarras* of 1818, brushed her cheeks just in front of her ears; from the ear-tips, replacing those pearls of La Paz snatched from her at Smuggler's Cove, swung pretty baubles of fine gold tracery with a tiny diamond gleaming and winking at the end of each like a drop of clear water about to fall. She wore a tight little silken jacket bound about the waist by a broad gay sash whose embroidered ends hung to the bottom of her skirt. Over her head, drawn provocatively forward to half display, half conceal the piquant saucy beauty of her face, was a lacy, misty mantilla.

Would she never turn and see him? He knew how she would be startled; he had no wish to frighten her.

Yet he could not count on many moments without interruption, and so at last spoke softly.

"Most sweet lady——"

She spun about upon a high, red heel; there was the flash of red silk stockings as her sudden movement made her skirts billow.

"Captain Cavalier!" she gasped.

He made her his bow, sweeping and graceful and gallant.

"Have no fear this time, señorita. I come but to speak a word or two and then go."

Why did this man affect her so? None other ever had! What she experienced now was not unlike the sensation when in the *presidio* she had seen the stir of military ardor. A dash of fear, despite his words and his smile; yet, along with it, a strangely delicious thrill.

"What should I fear?" She made a brave pretense at speaking fearlessly, though her hands were tight clenched and her breast rose and fell. She saw how the door was closed and how he stood with his back against it. "There are soldiers in the house. I have but to call."

"Most excellent! Then we'll have done with any thought of fear, so safe are you."

His eyes were twinkling, he seemed in the rarest good humor. She could have sworn just then that there was no evil in this man.

After her first moment almost of consternation, so deep had been her preoccupation and so unexpectedly broken, her thoughts flew thick and fast again. Here was an enemy of her people, and at an hour when Monterey stood in grave danger; yet he was one who had

stood her friend in her direst need. Here was one whom the governor had sworn to have hanged or shot on sight, and when she had said that soldiers were in the house, within call, she had spoken the truth. A ghastly vision formed in her lively imagination. She shivered slightly.

"You must go! If they find you here——"

"So you would not see me stretching rope for His Excellency? Nor would you witness my poor carcass metamorphosed into a bullet pouch and heavy with lead?" How swiftly those bold, eager eyes of his could catch fire. "By the light of glory then, Virginia Luisa, we are friends!"

"Shall I ever forget how you saved me from those horrible men? Shall I ever cease to be grateful and to pray for you, señor?" She spoke rapidly, her color flaming; whispering, urgent, tremulous. "But friends, señor? How can that be? You must go; I warn you, you will be put to death if you remain."

"How shall we be friends? Does friendship, most sweet lady, need a century like an oak to grow to its full estate? And is friendship everything? Between men, it suffices. But, how now, between a maid and a man? So lukewarm an emotion, I swear to you, will never satisfy me!"

He made her forget—and remember! Forget the soldiers in the house, the governor in the *presidio,* the ships in the bay; remember all that had passed between him and her. She had offered him a dare, if he was no coward; to return her to her own people and then to come for her. To multiply his own risks, to pile hazard upon hazard, to set himself single-handed against a host. And he had taken her dare.

It was odd, though this she did not realize until hours afterward, that her one impelling emotion at that instant, while with all her ears she listened for a call from her mother or the tread of soldiery, was a strong, fierce pride. Pride in him, a stranger, an unknown, an enemy to her people! As though he belonged to her, as though with full unquestionable right and reason she might rejoice in his boldness and prowess and rich manliness. Her blood was the hot turbulent blood of the south; how he stirred it and made it race! Romance for her had ever spelled itself in glowing golden letters. She had lived ever in dreams, awaiting reality.

"Friendship, Virginia?" He was repeating the word, picking it up, as it seemed, that he might toss it out of their path for once and all. "What have we to do with so pallid and puny a thing as that, you and I? Was that the rich guerdon which you promised me as reward if I set you free back there in the wilderness and later came on to you, as I do now? Let me think; what words did the distressed maiden speak? Did they not fall on my heart as sweetly as dew shaken from flowers? Would you hear them over, Virginia?"

Did he mock her? She could tell nothing, so baffling was that sudden gay smile of his. Her eyes fell.

"I begged you to save me from them—from yourself. I said that you were too noble——"

"You said," he reminded her gently, "just this: 'Would you risk much to have me yours, truly yours? To follow after me: really win me!' Aha!" he concluded in triumph, "you see that I have learned my lesson well; that I have it—by heart!"

Yes, he made her remember. The words were hers, coming back like a hushed echo now. When he grew silent, looking at her, other words came back to her, his own. "I find you adorable! Desirable! And I mean to have you for my own!"

She reddened and spoke hurriedly. Here was a crisis when one's head might dictate a certain utterance while one's heart cried out another. At such a time may the heart ever have the right of way!

"My mother, señor, whom you do not know, has sworn that I am to wed Don Nicolas Vara. And without delay."

"Your mother? Vara! The very black dog of treachery? What, lady, does your mother know so little of him then?"

"She has known him a full year. He came up from Mexico with letters proving him to be a true and distinguished gentleman——"

"Then I'll be bound it was his own hand that forged those letters. Distinguished? I doubt it sorely. True or a gentleman? Pah! You'll wed with none like him, my Virginia."

"I have said that you do not know my mother!"

"You mean she would force you?"

"Have not other maids, señor, married where they were told?" Her eyes flashed up, only to fall again.

"Not maids like you," he cried warmly. "But let us have the whole of this. What haste does your mother find necessary? And at a time like this?"

There was defiance in the way she lifted her head.

"She says that I am disgraced. That I have disgraced myself over and over. I have gone about like —like a man! I have not been properly chaperoned.

Tongues wag. Will she have me an old maid, señor? Is my family to be further disgraced by me thus? Yet, so my mother says, in a little while even Señor Vara would refuse to wed me, and then fingers will point while the tongues keep on clacking louder than ever—and people will laugh——"

Captain Cavalier laughed now.

"That mother of yours! I must come to know her better, I see that. The little wild violets in the grass, flirting away like mad with the wind or leaves set dancing or butterflies dipping down to them, this mother of yours would want them chaperoned next! But come; time passes and, as you have said, we must remember the soldiers. Already you have bidden me flee for my life. Curious, since it was to urge you to flee, and with no further loss of time, that I sought you."

"I flee, señor?"

"You, señorita. Of whom else should I think? Listen; out there in the bay are Bouchard's men, preparing to attack. With them is this Vara of your mother's, plotting with them——"

"Señor Vara with them?" She was incredulous.

"Nowhere else," he returned curtly, "unless it be that he has started for the shore to aid in the attack."

"Yet how do you know this? How could you?"

"How, unless I had just come from Bouchard's ship myself?"

"You went out to the ship?"

He bowed.

"But why, señor?" she asked eagerly. "What to do there?"

"To checkmate this Vara, at which I narrowly

failed. To have a fling at Harry Hawk. And finally, to offer myself to Bouchard as a leader in the assault."

She drew back and began to stare fearfully at him.

"You admit a thing like that? You say—what you have said to me—and then tell me this?"

"You think that I would make but a poor advocate? Well, perhaps. There have been few solicitors or men of that ilk among the Calverts of Virginia."

"You remain, then, an enemy to California?"

"What is California to me? A rich province absurd in its stubborn allegiance to a distant tyrant of a king. That is all; rather that was all until I met you, sweet lady!"

"Yet even now you offer your sword against my home?"

"To Bouchard, yes. But it happens that he refused the offer. Further, in emulation of your governor, he too ordered me shot! Hence I came away with little ceremony and without the men I had hoped to have from him. And without that reward I had demanded —and which your Vara demanded before me."

"And that reward?" she asked, with a sudden quickening of suspicion.

"One certain house in Monterey and all that it contained. I think that you can guess which house."

"But this is terrible!"

"Not so terrible as what you may look to experience within an hour or so, unless you are up and away. The attack may come at any minute; but," he added with a chuckle, "I have taken a pretty step all of my own to postpone it a bit. I have divided their forces for them and trust to give them pause long enough for Bouchard's already awakened suspicions of Vara

to grow apace. But strike they will and soon. So you must go. For one can see as plainly as he sees anything that Monterey is doomed."

"No! That cannot be. Our garrison will drive them back."

"You have about forty men? Bouchard has three or four hundred. You have fortifications, walls of earth and loose stones? Bouchard's guns will level them. One thing only you have which he has not: horses. You must use them while there is time."

"But I don't understand!"

"Haven't I made clear?"

"Not yourself! It is you that I do not understand. You come to warn me, yet you tell me that you would be the first to lead the attack against Monterey. Whose friend are you, California's or the pirates'? Whose enemy?"

"No friend to Sola, I'll be bound, since he orders me hanged! No friend to Bouchard, since he orders me shot! Whose friend, then? Yours, Virginia, in the first short step to being your lover! Whose enemy? Vara's, since nothing stirs my ire and rancor like a traitor. Especially," he added with a humorous quirk of his lips, "when to treachery he adds the further offense of coveting that which I covet for myself!"

"If this is all true that you tell me! If what you say of Señor Vara is true!"

"Do I lie, señorita?" he demanded sternly.

She looked deep into his eyes. They were clear: they were honest eyes. The man might be this or that: one thing he was not.

"What must I do?"

"I have told you. I add what you must not do:

you must not fall a second time into the hands of such men as follow Bouchard. You must not fall into Vara's hands. You must not fall into the hands of Vara's friend, Harry Hawk!"

"That man here, too? Oh, *Virgen santisima!*"

"Aye, and with Vara now. I let the little spider go when I should have set my heel on him, I suppose. They plan to bring men ashore from the *Argentina,* these to join forces with Harry Hawk's men hidden and awaiting at Tio Armenta's——"

"They are so close? Harry Hawk's men at Tio Armenta's place. *Ave Maria purisima!* We are lost then?"

"They were there. I sent them on a fool's errand, and they are out of the fight for to-night, I think. Yet it remains that Monterey is lost, and that you must go."

"Go? Where shall I go?"

"The others have fled to the King's *rancho.* You must follow them."

"But there is my mother, señor! She will not budge."

"Yet she knows that soon she may have to flee?"

"Yes; she sees that. But she says some of the ladies must remain until the last minute; she will not go and leave my father; she says always she must be near to attend to him. She watches over him like a child."

"She is a brave woman! And a wise, I have no doubt. For she keeps horses saddled and ready? And she can ride?"

"Yes, señor. And the ladies she has drawn about her, they are like that, too. Only now, after what you

tell me of Don Nicolas and his treachery, that may alter matters. Maybe now she will go."

She believed, after the first moment of shock, what he had told her. But then she was of a mind to believe nearly any sinister thing of Don Nicolas Vara. And now she was in the wildest haste to run back to her mother and her mother's friends.

"Shall I go to them, señor, with what you tell me? I am afraid that there is little time."

He stood aside, opening the door for her; for she was right, there was little time to waste.

She darted through, stopped abruptly, and came back. By now he, too, was outside. With sudden impetuosity she put out her hand to him.

"Oh, but you have been good, señor! And brave and generous."

He stood looking down into her face.

"You will try to slip out and tell me what they decide?"

"I will try. But, if you would hear with your own ears and see for yourself, there is an open window on the other side of the house. My mother and her friends are in there. And so, if I cannot see you again, *adiós,* señor."

Lingeringly he let her go. As she sped to the back door and was swallowed up by the house he went tiptoeing around a corner. There was a yellow flood of light indicating the open window. He came close to it through the flower garden. From the shadows of a heavy-timbered, vine-covered arbor, which abutted against the wall of the house, he could look inside. Thus he saw Señora de la Fuente and some two or three of those other intrepid matrons of Monterey who

had elected to remain behind with her and their husbands. They were passing in and out; in an adjoining room were those half-dozen soldiers of whom Virginia Luisa had told him, privates from the garrison faring sumptuously to-night.

Virginia Luisa burst into the room, crying excitedly:

"Mama, mama! We must fly! We are about to be attacked! There is treachery. That Señor Vara is a traitor; he has gone out to the pirate ships, telling Bouchard about everything on shore. Already boats are bringing men to attack. They have hundreds, hundreds! Monterey is doomed!"

Consternation filled the room. When her rush of words came to an end no one stirred or spoke. Fear started up; frightened eyes looked into frightened eyes.

But Virginia Luisa's mother was not of an order to remain inert long. It was women like her, as well as the adventurous male, who extended frontiers. Yes, and held them. Her quick intelligence was but briefly held dazed; it asserted itself almost instantly. Looking sharply at her daughter, she demanded:

"How do you know all this? Whom did you see just now when you went out to the kitchen?"

Now it was Virginia's turn to be confused. Strange that she had not anticipated that question first of all and had some answer ready against it. Now, though with high color in her cheeks, she could only blurt out the truth.

"It was Captain Cavalier. He told me. He is a friend!"

Gasps of new amazement greeted her. But she did not hear them. She was conscious only of her mother's eyes on her. Those eyes, from being opened wide,

slowly narrowed until they were almost closed. Keen and clever eyes, eyes bright now with suspicion.

"So," said her mother in a voice which went well with that look, "here before my friends you heap new high shame upon me, do you? You pretend to go to the kitchen to save the servants and let them have an hour of sleep—and what you do is have a clandestine meeting with that man! When I strive to protect your name against your own folly, you, right under my nose, carry on like this? Then, you come back and flaunt it all before us. And, to conclude the matter, you bring us the word of this foreigner, this pirate, this outlaw, this *Americano,* that Señor Vara, His Excellency's most trusted friend, is a traitor!"

She turned from her daughter, whom her words had stricken dumb, to her friends.

"Doña Guadalupe," she said sadly, "and you, Señora Marquina, and you, Doña Eloisa, and you and you, my *amigas,* you see, not for the first time, perhaps, the tragic spectacle of a proud family disgraced by a thoughtless, selfish, self-willed girl. Perhaps there are among you one or two who can understand and sympathize." There was less of sorrow and more of a steely glitter in her hard eyes as they rested first on Señora Marquina, then on a fidgeting little woman in a corner; the world knew that the daughter of one had run away with a drunken half-breed soldier, and the daughter of the other had been the indiscreet cause of a three months' scandal only last year.

The ladies sighed, but their eyes brightened. After all, the affair was such as to awaken lively speculations and some degree of satisfaction—since it was the question of another family than their own.

"Señor Vara," continued Virginia's mother, rather more stiffly and with a return of her usual confidence, "has long been my daughter's suitor, as you all know. He has spoken to Don Hilario and to me. It is understood; even my daughter, spoiled as she has been by her grandmother, understands. It is not a time now, you think, to speak of a wedding? There are extreme cases, *amigas*. This is one of them. The Church itself will understand and will set aside certain formalities."

She was actually smiling. She was of the sort who could fight hard and smile. And she was fighting now for her pride, for her reputation, and for her daughter's.

Also her brain was functioning logically. For a moment she had forgotten the chief cause of this trouble, Captain Cavalier, whom her daughter had just left and who could not be far. Still smiling like any Mona Lisa, she went to the door of the adjoining room and called sharply:

"*Soldados!* Outside is an enemy to California, that Captain Cavalier for whom dead or alive His Excellency has already offered five hundred *pesos*. I now, speaking for Don Hilario, offer another five hundred!"

There was a swift rising and scramble for muskets.

"Mama!" cried Virginia Luisa in despair.

It was at this moment that the front door opened. Here was Don Nicolas Vara entering, looking disturbed and uneasy.

CHAPTER XIII

"And I add still another five hundred!" exclaimed Vara. "*Por Dios*, a thousand! Come. *soldados;* there are two thousand *pesos,* enough to make you rich, to him who with a lucky shot brings down this American dog."

They fell over one another in their haste, each snatching up the handiest gun, and poured out through the nearest door. With them, though he had come upon another business, went Vara, urging them on. Virginia Luisa sought wildly to call them back, a sense of betrayal heavy upon her. From her mother's friends came varied exclamations.

"Surround the house," shouted Vara. "If you see any one, shoot first and ask questions afterward. Two thousand *pesos,* remember!"

The thing had happened so quickly, so unexpectedly, that for a moment Captain Cavalier was like a man with his back in a corner and with no avenue of escape. Through the window and through the room beyond he had seen Vara entering; he had even caught a glimpse of a vague, iron-gray garbed figure at his heels. Then this sudden clamor, garden and yard filling with armed men, and flight shut off. So, like one who contemplates disaster, he stood motionless and uncertain.

But in a flash that irresolution passed. There was always a way if a man could but see it. In such an optimistic outlook was the working philosophy of this Captain Cavalier grounded. They sought him every-

where, in the garden, in the yard. *Ergo*, he must be in neither. The sturdy grape arbor was overhead. He reached upward blindly, caught hold, and went up like a cat up a tree.

"I can thank my lucky star for the dark," he thought with a degree of satisfaction.

An unhappy expression, when you consider it. A star does not connote and does not shed darkness. He looked up at the sky. It had ceased the intermittent drizzle; the wind had made rifts here and there in the half fog, half cloud, and, true enough, not one star alone but several were twinkling down. Therefore he squatted low where he was, on the top of the arbor, close to the eaves of the house.

"He is near-by," Vara's voice on the other side of the house now was exclaiming. "Else we could have heard him running. Close in, men. He will make a dash for it; then shoot, every one of you."

Captain Cavalier could have wished that he had not so utterly fallen into the folly of eavesdropping. No good ever came of that sort of thing. He could imagine what would happen if he made the slightest sound. A spray of musket balls, with him, indeed, in high luck if his body did not stop more than one of them!

He shifted cautiously an inch or two, drawing closer to the roof, trusting in the sombre tiles to conceal him, grateful for the dark hues of his garments. The roof was a gently sloping affair; the tiles gave him hand hold. Would they ever think of looking up there for him? At least, this struck him as a better place for him just now than the arbor itself, under which some inquisitive soldier might come poking with his musket

at any moment. So, lying spread out, pressed tight to the tiles, he began a slow wriggling upward.

Curse that diabolical Nicolas Vara! The man was using all his wits to-night. He fairly boiled with venomous hatred. That ill-fated visit to Bouchard; most of all, perhaps, the trick that had been worked on Harry Hawk's men, if discovered or even guessed at by now, had put an ugly minded man into as ugly a mood as ever tingled in the treacherous hide of his ilk. Here he was, shouting still further infernal orders:

"Keep an eye on the house itself. He may have gone up on the roof. That would be like him."

Captain Cavalier ground his teeth in rage. For a second he was tempted to crawl toward that voice, to locate his man below, to jump down on top of him and treat him to a dagger thrust as he landed.

Yet now was scarcely the time for any intriguing little sallies of so purely personal a trend. What he wanted most to-night was a whole skin to carry out of this fracas. An interview with Nicolas Vara might be had afterward. So he crawled on and on, now and then looking up at that unwelcome rift in the sky. It seemed to him, though maybe his desires tricked him, that again the high wind was closing it.

Dimly he began to make out now the blurred forms below; a soldier running here, one moving yonder.

"Be careful," warned Vara, "that you don't shoot one another. Save your lead for that foreign spy."

"He thinks of everything," growled Cavalier in his throat.

He had inched along until he came to the end of the sloping roof. He put his head out a little, thinking to look down into the garden. Instead, he made out that

below this gable was another roof, a flat one. If he could lower himself to this he had a better chance of concealment, a far better place to stand if it came to a fight. Give him secure foothold there, let the rift above close again, then let them come up for him. Let Vara come first!

Here was the greatest risk of detection, during the split-second it would require him to slip over the edge of the slanting roof to come to the flat one just below. But that risk, among others, must be run, and the quicker the thing was done the better. So he caught a secure hold on the edge, drew himself closer, and in a flash the thing was done. He dropped down, tight pressed against the gable end of the building. And when ten seconds passed and there was no volley of musketry, he breathed a vast deal more easily than at any time since he had played cat to the arbor.

He even began of a sudden to find a certain zest in the situation. It was by no means desperate as he chose to regard it; he had his sword and his dagger; he had a brace of double-barrelled pistols; he had a wall to shadow him, and he had a level surface under his feet. Then, there was a satisfactory degree of darkness. It was a game of hide and seek, his wits against Vara's. And he had the advantage of knowing just where his enemies were, while, crafty as Vara might be, theirs was only guesswork.

Further, as must have become apparent before this, Captain Cavalier belonged to that fortunate order of men who are ever assured that the next turn of the wheel is going to ameliorate rather than aggravate conditions. It is a noteworthy fact that to those who are always confident of good fortune, good fortune

comes. Perhaps the explanation offers itself in the fact itself; they are always looking for that which they desire in so full a confidence that, therefore, they are the first to see it when it lies at their feet. On the other hand, pessimism shuts the eyes.

Now Captain Cavalier, feeling that his bright destiny must be standing close by to lend a hand, was all ears and eyes and questing fingers. Thus, just as Vara was inspired to the act which certainly must have disclosed him, he made his discovery.

"Two of you bring armfuls of dry fodder from the barn," Vara was commanding. "We'll light two fires. If he's on the roof or elsewhere in hiding, we'll have him out."

Had there been ample time for speculation, instead of none at all, Captain Cavalier might have expected to find just what he did find. Roofs serve their purposes, some this way, some that. A sloping roof sheds the rain. A flat roof, given the slightest pitch in the world, turns rain and sun after its fashion; if not quite so well as the other type, yet well enough, and with an added value. The Mexican homes and the Spanish, prototypes of the old Californian, have roofs up to which people may go in the cool of evening, there to sit and look out over whatever expanse of view their surroundings offer. To arrive at these exalted places they require a steep stairway along a wall or, where more primitive conditions obtain, a ladder and a trap-door. Captain Cavalier had found a trap-door.

Squatting over it on his heels, he had ample time for thought. The men were off on a run to the barn, but some moments must pass before they could get the dry fuel, return with it, and get it blazing with flint

and steel, or even with a candle brought out from the house. So he fell to considering. Who were left within doors? Half a dozen of the friends of Virginia Luisa's mother; the mother herself, and Virginia Luisa. All women. With them, perhaps, the one he had seen at Vara's heels a little while ago, in the iron-gray garb. Women and a priest.

So to go down seemed logical enough at first view. No danger in the house just now. Later? When the women would scream and the soldiers came running back? Well, that time had not arrived yet; well enough to think of it when it came. There remained always the trap-door.

And here came the men with the stuff for their fires.

Captain Cavalier pried the trap-door up, lifting it gingerly. He peered down into a room but dimly lighted; what light there was came into it through an open door giving upon the *sala*. He could hear hushed voices bespeaking the natural flutter of excitement. Quick utterances, sudden silences. He heard a broken plea from Virginia Luisa:

"Father, intercede with them—they will do murder—it is not God's will that men kill one another—stop them!"

He heard the reply in the one masculine voice in the house, a voice which to Captain Cavalier, who may have had his prejudices, sounded as though the man had pebbles in his mouth. It mumbled so that one was hard beset to understand the words.

"Peace my daughter—I, a soldier of God—there must be, too, soldiers of the king—God's justice and man's justice——"

Captain Cavalier's groping fingers found what they

sought, a ladder leading down. They were lighting the fires now. He lowered himself through the opening. Trap-door or just plain trap? He wondered as he went through. Well, this way was open, and his place above was no longer tenable. He closed the opening after him. A moment later he stood in the room below, taking swift stock of his new surroundings.

There was one window. He had never seen a window he liked less. With its heavy bars of oak in lieu of iron it smacked of a jail at a moment like this. True, oaken bars might be hacked through with a sword, but what a time it would take, what a din it would make! There was one door. It led to the room where the ladies were.

He peered in on them. They had but a couple of candles burning, hence the small amount of light where he was. He could see Virginia Luisa; she sat head bowed, her face in her hands. He could see him of the muffled voice, his figure nearly as muffled as his speech. Long gray gown, worn sandals, capacious hood drawn well forward over his head; little of his person seen. In his hands a staff with a crude wooden cross at its upper end; hanging from the staff such a bundle as a wandering priest could be seen any day carrying upon his long marches.

He had his glimpses of two others in the room, Virginia Luisa's mother one of the two. She stood very erect; her mouth was closed tight, making set lines of determination. There was a quiver to her chin and a flash in her eyes which moved Captain Cavalier to respect her as a woman of a very high degree of capability.

Again, keeping in the darkest spot in the room, the

corner into which his ladder had brought him, he regarded his more immediate surroundings. This, obviously, was a spare room, and as such given up to household odds and ends. There was a crude spinning-wheel, made doubtless by some of the mission Indians; a huge willow basket heaped high with pieces of cloth; a table whose cloth came down almost to the floor. Captain Cavalier let his eyes linger with this; it would appear to offer the only possible hiding place in the square, plain, closetless chamber. If fate drove, a man might have some hope of avoiding discovery if he crawled under that table and resigned himself to a weary period of cramped muscles.

All the while he could hear the voices outside. They sought him everywhere. Presently, he mused, they would become convinced that he was neither in the grounds nor on top of the house. Then they would give him up and grumblingly come back indoors.

He glanced again at the friendly table. There was an earthen jug on it and several cups and glasses, some half full. There were a couple of coffee cups and some plates which had been wiped clean with bits of *tortilla*. It was here, then, that the soldiers had been sitting when the alarm was given? It would be here that they returned in a few minutes, to talk of their nearly acquired riches while they finished their wine. Captain Cavalier fell to frowning. Best, perhaps, to wait until they began to come in, then return by way of the ladder to his former place on the roof. Yet, it would be very like the meticulous Nicolas Vara to leave a guard outside and the fires burning.

There remained the clothes basket.

Voices outside, steps running up and down. Voices

from the next room; a scrap of conversation to hold him attentive a moment. It was Virginia Luisa's mother, giving a curious intonation to her words:

"You are a stranger to us, father. And I did not know that there were any priests in this part of California whom I did not know? Señor Vara said that he would bring one of the fathers from the Mission Carmelo——"

The mumbling voice hastened to explain.

"As you see, señora, I am but arrived this moment! From the south; but recently from the College San Fernando in Mexico. Bearing letters to the fathers here; one to Señor Vara, whom I had the pleasure of knowing in Mexico. I had the further good fortune to meet him just now, while we both were on our way to the mission——"

"It is very strange," said Doña Manuela.

Strange? Captain Cavalier scented something beyond the merely strange here. A coincidence with a sinister twist. This mumbling fellow with the hidden face came in such timely fashion at Vara's need.

"Señor Vara explained to you what was wanted?"

"Yes, señora. Everything. It is unusual, of course. There should normally be the banns—— But you know how it is. Still, in so abnormal a case, in a matter of so great an urgency, with Monterey about to be attacked and perhaps some of us killed, such matters may be set aside. If you will get Señor Vara to come in the marriage can be performed without delay."

Virginia Luisa sprang to her feet. Her eyes fairly burned against the dead white of her face.

"No. No, no, no! I won't be wedded against my will. Never to Señor Vara; he is a traitor——"

The mother all the while was scrutinizing Vara's priest.

"You understand, father?" she said icily. "Myself and my husband consent; Governor Sola wishes it. The girl is too young to know——"

The concealing cowl nodded vehemently.

"In extreme cases——" he mumbled. "With father and mother——"

"No!" cried the girl passionately. Then she grew still and began to shiver. Then she cried out: "But my father is not here! He would not allow this!"

"I have sent for him," her mother said quietly. "He is coming now."

It was but a few steps from the house to the *presidio,* and here at last came Don Hilario. He had stopped outside a moment to inquire concerning the fires; to give his suggestions; and now entered the house. At the first sight of him in the doorway his wife sniffed audibly.

For Don Hilario, in the fine access of his military ardor, finding no enemy to fall upon, had attacked a bottle of California brandy instead. His wife, busied with other matters, had not stopped him. The long hours had dragged; here it was long after midnight, and Don Hilario equally as long past that correct mental clarity which all required on a night like this one. He had arrived at a condition of very proper, very exact, and very stiff dignity, and of a certain fogginess within like that of the night outside. He risked somewhat in the profound bow which he made as he came in.

His daughter ran to him, throwing her arms about

his neck, bending his haughty head down to hers, weeping and pleading.

"They are trying to make me marry that horrible Vara. You won't let them, will you, *papa mio?* You will save me, won't you?"

He patted her shoulder; he looked wise; he nodded approvingly. He muttered something about his pride in her, her maidenly modesty, her natural shrinking. Then he began to eulogize Vara, to name him his son.

Virginia Luisa, as at a blow, shrank away from him. Don Hilario, his hand on his sword, cried valorously:

"Viva! Viva Fernando! Viva Sola! Viva California——"

His roving eye chanced to meet his wife's, and he fell suddenly silent. He even began to look uncomfortable.

"Don Hilario," said his wife in that quiet, penetrating voice of hers, "you have not noticed that we have company. These ladies, the *padre*——"

He had forgotten his hat, but now with her eye on it he whipped it off hastily.

"Forgive me! In the excitement of this terrible night——"

Virginia Luisa, seeing herself bereft of her last ally, was for a moment on the dizzy edge of swooning. But there was too much of her own mother in her blood for her to yield as long as a single avenue stood open. There was the door to the front yard, wide open. She caught up her skirts and made a headlong dash toward it.

But only to have the way barred by her mother herself, who, with one eye on Don Hilario and his hat,

seemed to have the other always upon her little daughter. Virginia Luisa felt herself thrust back. She whirled toward another door, that leading to her own room. If she could only get in there and bolt her door! Then let them threaten and plead and batter all night long. But now it was her own father who, smiling his kindly smile and judging all this a bit of maidenly play, stepped in front of her, his arms out, while he said gayly:

"Oho, my little one! Would you trick us out of a wedding——"

She screamed and stamped her foot and gave them all a picture of another sort of marriage; despair wedded to rebellion. How her mother's friends stared at her; how they whispered among themselves; how they pointed out this spoiled child and thanked God that He had never inflicted such disobedience on them!

Here at last came Vara. Virginia Luisa saw him coming to the front door. She looked wildly about her. Yonder another door stood open; the door to the little room—*where the ladder led up to the roof!* And now no one stood in her way but Vara's priest. She crashed full tilt into him, won by him. She shot through the open door, whipped it shut after her, stood leaning against it, putting all her slight weight and all her small strength against it.

Here, with the door shut, it was pitch dark. There was no bolt, no bar here. Captain Cavalier, half a dozen steps away from her, could hear her moaning, talking to herself, praying for some way to hold the door shut against them.

She did not hear his step as he came silently but swiftly to her. When she did hear a low whisper from

lips close to her hair, a frightened scream burst from her.

"Sh!" commanded the whispering voice again. "I help you hold the door. And then I promise to save you from this farce of a wedding."

"*Ave Maria purisima!*" gasped Virginia Luisa. "Have I gone mad then? You—you are——"

"Cavalier, and none other," came the whisper. It was an expressive whisper as whispers go; it seemed to her light and gay, inconsequential! What a man this was.

"It can't be! I left you outside——"

"I came down through the trap-door.—Are you of a mind to see me shot to-night, sweet lady? Are you of a mind to wed that Vara? Or would you like it better for us both to go free?"

Thus far none had sought to follow her. In the next room voices were speaking urgently; her mother's, Vara's. And here at last came her mother to the door, saying commandingly:

"Come out, child. Do not drive us to forcing the door and dragging you out."

"Tell her to wait a minute," whispered Cavalier. "Promise that if they will give you five minutes you will come out. We'll both go free to-night, I swear to you, if you do as I tell you."

Understanding nothing, now not even seeking to understand that which must sound simple impossibility, yet she did swiftly as he commanded.

"Give me a minute alone," she cried. "Five minutes, and I'll come out."

Captain Cavalier patted her shoulder softly. There

was a world of comfort and downright encouragement in his touch.

From the other side of the door, silence. Her mother was thinking. Presently, having thought to some effect, she said:

"You may have your way in this, child. Five minutes and no longer. And pray do not think to escape by the roof. For the soldiers are watching up there."

Again Virginia Luisa moaned hopelessly.

"You see, señor, all ways are shut to us! Oh, why, why did you do so mad a thing as to come in here? We are lost——"

The man was chuckling softly, but in what seemed high and rare amusement!

"You speak in Chinese, my Virginia Luisa!" he whispered, making her wonder afresh. "Now do as I say and you, too, will have a good hearty laugh before we're done. You will call again to your mother. You will make your voice sound tearful and broken and hopeless. As though to sigh that what must be, must be. But you will stand firm on this one thing: you will not be wed until the father confesses you!"

"I don't understand——"

"But you are going to understand! And laugh, too, I tell you; most of all at our friend Vara. You will demand to be confessed before entering upon holy matrimony. Even your mother will not deny you this. You will bid them send the priest in here, to you. He will bring a candle and he will come alone——"

"You will stab him! You will kill him so that he cannot marry me!"

"Killing him might serve an excellent purpose," he

rejoined. "Yet it would give us none of our coveted laughter. No, I'll not kill him." Again he began chuckling. "Though perhaps your mother may later come close to that."

"Oh, señor, there is no hope——"

"Do as I bid you. Quick now! There is always hope!"

In a blind maze she obeyed. She opened the door an inch or two and made her demand. It was greeted with silence and then with acquiescence. Surely, even in so hasty an affair, any girl might have a moment to make her little confession. Not her mother, not even Nicolas Vara, could think of denying her that. As for Don Hilario, he was very proud of his little daughter that she should remember such a duty.

Here came Vara's priest, shuffling in his sandals, carrying his staff in one hand and the candle in the other. Virginia Luisa opened the door only sufficiently to admit him. Captain Cavalier leaped nimbly behind the panel as the gowned and cowled figure entered.

Suddenly the door closed, Virginia Luisa standing with her back to it. And now Captain Cavalier stood forth unhidden, a look of terrible sternness in his eyes, a double-barrelled pistol in his hand and the gaping muzzle of that pistol not a foot from the astonished and frightened face under the heavy cowl.

"One word," hissed Captain Cavalier, "and you are a dead man!"

The command was unnecessary. The other was bereft of all power of speech. He could only stare and gasp.

"Virginia," commanded Cavalier, "do your part. Let them hear you talking fast and vehemently. Pray

the good father to save you; to refuse to perform this marriage. Anything you can think of, while I do what I have to do."

Just what she would have done in any case. She began, almost incoherent.

"Now," ordered Captain Cavalier, "I'll trouble you for your saintly garb. Off with it, my fine fellow. Fast, and never a word if you set any value upon your life."

Aha! It was just as he had suspected. The fellow had not even taken time to present a tonsured crown. The cowl came off; no priest at all, as was most obvious; but one of Bouchard's fellows whom Cavalier had seen more than once. Off came the gray gown; beneath was a most unpriestly garb, retained against the cold; a belt with a dagger and a pistol in it. Virginia Luisa, looking on in astonishment, felt as though the world had dropped away from beneath her feet. What madness was this?

"You see, the cheap fellow *has* pebbles in his mouth," grinned Captain Cavalier. "He must mumble and jumble his words a bit so that unaccustomed phrases, a Latin word or two, maybe, might not come out too clearly against him. A trick there I'll copy from you, Sir Pretender."

Virginia Luisa began to understand. There stood Captain Cavalier clothed from head to foot in the Franciscan habit. He drew the cowl far forward, just as the other had done. He even removed his boots, tied them about his middle under the gown, and slipped his feet into the worn sandals. Finally he took a couple of pistol balls from his pouch and thrust them under his tongue.

"Keep up your pleading," he bade Virginia, who was all eyes and had forgotten her part. "I've one other little pleasantry before me."

She began again, hurriedly. He dragged his plucked chicken of an impostor to the far corner where the clothes basket was. With the muzzle of his pistol never wavering, he made the fellow stuff his mouth full of bits of cloth. He tied his hands and feet; he bound a bandage about the mouth full of rags. Leaving him in this fashion, lying along the wall, Cavalier returned to Virginia. Now his pistol was hidden; the staff was in his hands; the cowl still further drawn over his face.

"Now, my daughter," he said, the leaden pellets in his mouth lending their aid toward making his utterance not unlike the impostor's, his eyes dancing, his voice lifted so that they might hear it in the *sala,* "I must return to your mother and father. After what you have told me I must have a word with them. And also with Señor Vara."

Her own eyes began to shine. She could see nothing of his face in the shadows; his voice he had copied so nicely from that other mumbling voice, that it would deceive any one.

He stooped closer to whisper:

"I'll not tarry long with them, no fear. Later, when they find this poor devil in here—I grow half sorry for him. Those women will come close to tearing him to pieces! And Vara? He'll need to do a bit of explaining——"

He caught up her hand, made her a profound bow, looked straight into her eyes, and said soberly:

"After to-night nothing on earth shall keep me from making you my own, Virginia.—To follow after; to

really win you!—And now, my daughter," and he lifted his voice again, to be heard in the next room, "if you will open the door for me?"

She did so slowly; she began to tremble now. She saw him go back among them. Yonder stood Vara, alert and watchful; in the doorway, staring in curiously, were three of the soldiers.

She watched him, fascinated. He shuffled into the room, dragging his sandals, leaning on the tall staff. He raised a hand as though commanding silence.

She gripped the door with both hands, clinging to it for support. Did Vara suspect something? Did he start now? How keen those black eyes of his were!

Now Captain Cavalier was speaking. He had gone straight to Vara himself. He mouthed his words indistinctly as the other had done.

"Señor Vara, a word alone with you—just outside—something which the señorita has told me——"

"No," cried Vara impatiently. "I must to the *presidio* immediately; the attack may come at any minute. We must hurry——"

He was plucked by the sleeve. The tongue struggling with the pistol balls insisted.

"Come, I say. A word only, my son. A moment, no more."

The cowled figure passed on, to the door. The soldiers fell back for him to pass. With an imprecation Vara leaped after him.

"What fool's play is this, man?"

"Sh! Danger, I tell you! Come; follow me; a dozen paces; a score of steps——"

Within they stared at one another. Virginia Luisa had come back into the room now, leaving the door

closed after her. Her mother's eyes, always keen, were troubled; they grew cloudy with mystification. She was not to be the last one of them to sense something amiss—gravely amiss. From the very beginning she had been uneasy——

A mumbling voice outside, growing fainter with distance. Vara's voice, querulous, insistent, enraged. The two voices now, from a greater distance. Silence. Virginia Luisa's face was white; she sank into a chair. Her heart was beating furiously.

Then, startling them all, there was a ringing laugh. A shout, a curse, a blow. The sound of racing footsteps. Then Vara's voice again, raised high, breaking in the blackest rage that had ever gripped him.

"*Soldados!* This way. Run! Shoot! It is that dog Cavalier who has tricked us. He escapes."

And then, from a greater distance, barely borne to their ears now, that ringing laughter again. About Virginia Luisa, blank faces; consternation. In one pair of eyes alone, shining happiness. Virginia Luisa turned those eyes to her mother.

"God has saved me," she said softly . . .

While others scowled, she began to smile.

". . . . and Captain Cavalier!"

She ran to the closed door.

"Now, mama," she said gaily, "I want to show you your priest."

CHAPTER XIV

Captain Cavalier was as happy as a lark. He loved a good laugh for its own sake, and had it now. He visualized Don Nicolas Vara's face at this moment of discomfiture, and the vision pleased him. The man to-night would need to fill his mouth as full of lies as the devil could prompt him. And he would need to go warily under those eyes of Virginia Luisa's mother!

What a night the kind gods of his destiny had given him! Drizzle, drizzle, drizzle wept the skies over him; but his heart skipped and danced to a merry music. On such a night a man breathed deep more than once; his blood tingled; he knew moments when life was a real and vibrant affair; at the end he drank to the full of the sort of victory to fill the cup most befittingly. Yes; things went very well.

"There'll be no maid wedded against her will to-night," he confided in that most sympathetic of all confidants, himself. "And perhaps we have saved her from all annoyance from this Vara; it is likely, for when the lady mother has her suspicions awakened by so ugly a bit of business as a false priest, she'll not rest until she knows all there is to know."

He stood at this moment at a spot which could not be tenable long—at the edge of the wood about equally distant from the *castillo* and the *presidio*. Surely he could count on Vara setting pursuit afresh upon his heels. Yet here he tarried a little longer, grown from gay to grave as he strove with certain thoughts.

What had Vara meant by a play like that? Why his impostor of a priest instead of a true *padre?* Because time had been short? Because, while saying that he would ride the couple of miles to Carmel Mission, he had had other business with Bouchard? Or because he knew that he could find no true Californian priest who would be a party to hounding a girl into wedlock with him?

He had been actuated, first of all, by haste; that appeared obvious. And in all likelihood therein lay the sole explanation. Further, Captain Cavalier was the first to see that Vara might have counted on the very bald boldness of his stroke succeeding.

It grew late. Long after midnight now; nearing three in the morning, perhaps. And still no attack. Here was another matter worthy of a brief pondering.

"That means," mused Captain Cavalier, all smiles again, "that I upset all their plans by losing them their men hidden at Tio Armenta's. Thus I will have put a pinch of fresh suspicion in Bouchard's snuff-box for him to sneeze over. And he was full of suspicion of Vara from the jump; never was Frenchy Bouchard the man to give great confidence to a traitor, self-confessed! And none knows better than he the intricate crookedness of little Harry Hawk. So Bouchard awaits daylight. The attack comes at dawn. H'm!"

His musing grew more and more profound. Doubtless he should even now be making good his escape from any place so near fortress and *presidio.*

"Haste just now led Vara into a mess of things," he muttered. "Haste upsets the kettle and puts out the fire. I'll have none of it."

That was like him; to rush when others loitered and

to loiter himself when the bugle blew boots and saddles. He was struggling with a problem like an oaken log for the stubborn knots in it. He put the matter before himself thus:

"There's to be fighting at any moment—and I'm out of it! A pest to a fix like this. Bouchard's ordered me shot, thus declaring war on a certain Cavalier. We become open enemies that have long been enemies in gloves. Bouchard's doing, when I offered him an alliance. Well, I accept your decree, Monsieur Bouchard; enemies let's have it.

"Now, there remains the other side of the battle—and this Spanish governor orders me shot! It would appear, Captain Cavalier, that for once your sword is not welcomed. Two camps bristling, and here I dawdle between. Was there ever a situation so annoying?"

He took snuff absently and, thus it chanced, copiously. Thereafter he sneezed. That brought him to himself; he withdrew a dozen paces or so, into the outer fringe of the wood.

"I could sit on a log back here and have the grand view," he went on soliloquizing. "That would offer novelty—but nothing else. No; it won't do. With a good fight coming on, I've got to take sides. And that is the only clear star of a thought in a rainy night."

As though it were in truth a star, he fixed his attention steadily upon this thought. What part for Captain Cavalier? With which side by any possibility lay his sympathies? Why, all of a sudden with little beleaguered Monterey!

Why not? With friends in neither camp, yet here was Virginia Luisa. Further, he well knew that at any hour those two craft in the bay would be spilling

a murderous mob not less than three full hundred strong upon this tiny post, garrisoned by forty.

He put away his snuff-box and tapped the hilt of his sword.

"With the odds nearly ten to one, do you hesitate, Captain Cavalier?" he demanded of himself. "You, who have ever loathed oppression, too!—and then, there is another thing——"

Of a sudden he realized that this was a land wherein he would like to abide. He had fought under more than one flag, had sailed upon more than one ship, had seen his bit of the world as an adventurer sees it, and now, behold, he was of a mind to have done with roistering up and down. He knew more of this California than was to be gleaned in one short visit; but a few years ago the smuggling trade had intrigued him and he had put into several sequestered ports and had even glimpsed through their windows, as it were, the sort of life lived by the *rancheros*. There was a dash of color in it that caught him; a spaciousness to arouse a wanderer's envy. Here men built them up their own kingdoms; set their own queens upon thrones of their building; nodded like gods on Olympus.

He snatched off his hat. He drew his sword with a flourish.

"At this moment I become a right *Californio!*"

He was vastly pleased with his decision. In high fettle, he told himself: "To be a right *Californio* is to be one of the lords of the earth! It is to have a gay heart, a generous and a hospitable. It is to abound in loyalty to the death, to one's friends. It is to fight fearlessly for one's happiness and to be happy while in the fighting. It is to sing and dance and ride a fine horse.

"*Ergo,* Captain Cavalier, there are certain things which you lack and must supply yourself without delay: Friends to be loyal to; the wherewithal to become the very coin of generosity; the fine horse to ride. Forward!"

Despite the dark and that there were no eyes to see, he marched forward with a very fine swagger. He was up to one of his old tricks, and brought into its accomplishment a rare bubbling zest. Obeying impulse, yet he did not altogether abandon reason—though there would be some who might maintain that he and reason had never been on speaking terms. He said within himself that Vara and the soldiers would be yapping after him; that they would seek him everywhere——

No; not everywhere. They would be sure of two places where he would not be found; that he would not linger longer about the house from which they had routed him, and, most obvious of all, that he would give the *presidio* a wide berth. Therefore it was that, sword in hand, hat cocked jauntily, he directed his light steps directly toward the broad *presidio* gate.

"Ho! The guard!" he called breezily.

He had stopped at a sufficient distance to appear safe in his eyes; far enough away so that they could make little of him in the dark and, were they minded to fire, would very likely miss him altogether.

"Who goes?" came the swift retort.

"A friend! *A right Californio!* One who would have word immediately with His Most Excellent Excellency, Don Pablo Sola."

He could hear the rippling murmur among the sev-

eral men constituting the guard at the gate; he could fancy, rather than see, the shifting of muskets, all aimed his way.

"Come forward then, *amigo.*"

Suspicion breathed in the words; there was no convincing ring to the word "friend." Captain Cavalier sighed.

"I'll have to overcome a deal of prejudice," he told himself regretfully. To the guard he called back: "Not so fast, *amigo.* Send a man to the governor; let him carry word that one with vital information regarding the enemy stands without; and, for full measure, you may add that this messenger, being a real and true friend to a certain Captain Cavalier, will entrust himself within the gate only upon having His Excellency's plighted word of honor to let him go free again of this place into which he voluntarily thrusts his nose."

Again they murmured at the gate. Captain Cavalier stood stooped a little, muscles tense, ready to spring back and take to his heels at the first sign of danger. But presently he heard the officer in command issue his instructions; a private hastened through the gate into the walled enclosure with his request to the governor. Almost immediately he returned running.

"His Excellency will see you, señor. Enter."

"I have his assurance?"

"But of course, señor. This way."

He came forward at that. They opened the gate just wide enough for him to go through, staring at him curiously all the while. Thus he stepped from the outer dark into the bright flickering light of the fires blazing away in the *plaza.* The gate closed after

him; two men fell in at his sides, both armed and still suspicious, escorting him toward the governor's apartments.

He had eyes for everything as he went along. He noted how all was in readiness here—and, having already bestowed his allegiance, he stifled a sigh. What a pitiful lack of strength in this, California's capital city! A lack of men, a lack of guns. A mere handful of musketeers reinforced by a smaller handful of Indians sleeping on their bows and arrows.

Don Pablo, his elbows on his table, his gray head in his hands, slewed about at the sound of footsteps. Then suddenly, seeing who came, he bounded to his feet.

"You!" he roared after the first moment of speechlessness. "Captain Cavalier—what effrontery——"

Captain Cavalier bowed with his hand on his heart.

"Reporting for duty, Your Excellency," he returned. "A right *Californio* burning to strike a blow for the land of his adoption."

"Your impudence, then, knows no bounds? You grow insufferable, sir!"

"No. Believe me, señor, I come in all earnestness, sincerity, and loyalty."

"A renegade! An officer among pirates. A spy."

Captain Cavalier held himself in hand. How, otherwise, was he to gain anything here?

"I bring you certain word, señor——"

"I want none of it!" Sola's big fist crashed down upon his table; his nostrils quivered. "I'll hear nothing from you."

"You must," said Captain Cavalier serenely.

"What, must? Have a care, you young free-booter——"

"Aye, must," rejoined Captain Cavalier equably. "Since you were never the man to be California's governor were you not a man above petty personalities when it grows a question of state. California must come first with you, señor; personal likes and dislikes after."

Sola went back to his chair. After all, curiosity stirred in him as in others. His eyes narrowed as he demanded:

"What brings you? You have quarrelled with your own pack of cut-throats once, I believe? Over a girl. Are you come now, perhaps, to betray them into my hands? Or, at least, with some such wild tale?"

"You hit near the mark, yet miss it clean," was the cool answer. "But, since you speak of betrayals, I come first of all to say this: Beware of Nicolas Vara. There's your traitor for you. He's hand in glove already with Bouchard."

Sola smiled grimly.

"You aspire to the maid for your own, then? That is it?"

"I warn you against Vara. As to the maid, no doubt he has lost all hope of her by now! After his trick of the false priest——"

"Is the man mad? What is this of a false priest?"

Captain Cavalier shrugged.

"I bring you word only of such matters as you could not come to know of save through me. As to this one, you have but to despatch a soldier to the house of Don Hilario. There, I'll be bound, he will find a pretty tale to come running back to you with.

Your rascal is a thorough-going one, señor, when he seeks to trick a maid into a false marriage——"

"How now!" shouted Sola. "What do you mean by all this nonsense? You accuse Señor Vara, my friend, I'll have you understand, first of treating traitorously with the enemy; next of resorting to such a deed as betraying a maid. You——"

"It is but a few steps to where the tale can be told," Captain Cavalier said gravely. "Your Excellency has but to despatch a soldier, as I have said, and thus have substantiated one of my accusations."

Sola beckoned one of the guard still in the doorway.

"Double the guard at the gate," he commanded tersely. "Some treachery is afoot; I smell it. Then go swiftly to Don Hilario's house; say that I have sent you to know what has happened there. Return as fast as you can. And, on your way out, order half a dozen soldiers sent me here."

The soldier saluted and ran.

Sola turned again upon his unwelcome visitor.

"Have you done, señor?"

"I have but begun! Listen." And, cutting his tale as short as could be crammed into a succinct outline, he told of his visit earlier in the night to Bouchard's ship; of Vara's dickerings with both Harry Hawk and Hipolyte Bouchard. Sola listened in amazement.

"Do you expect me to believe a tale like that? Coming from you?"

Captain Cavalier laughed.

"A right *Californio* always expects what he desires, señor! Yet, possibly because I am but a novitiate, as

it were, I must confess I hardly hoped for full credence."

"Then why come here to tell me such wild tales?"

Sola was puzzled. There was something in the very bearing of this young fellow that impressed him; something in the flash of his eyes, in the ring of his voice. Here, confronting him now, might be the very king of rascals, gay and debonair and devilish; one not above the trick of a swagger upon occasion; the very swashbuckling kill-devil which rumor had named him. Yet it remained that he bore himself like a gentleman—and Don Pablo Sola knew his gentleman and had a keen scent for the spurious, imitation article. The thought agitated itself in Sola's puzzled brain that your true gentleman of the old school might fall into many errors—yet he did not lie.

"I came to you," said Captain Cavalier simply, "on the instant that I saw it my clear duty; I came out of loyalty to this fair California the instant I gave her my allegiance and vowed that here I should make me my home. For, though you might not believe all and all at once, yet you would have your eyes open. Your reason might even cry me down in all that I tell you; yet your heart must glimpse something of the truth. No matter what you say to me now, you will watch this Vara. Thus, I have done all that I can and, if in ever so little, I have done that little for California."

Sola began drumming on the table.

"You would have me think that Señor Vara, a most trusted friend, is in reality my enemy?"

"In time you will know that you sit in a chair where Vara would sit. That he has trafficked with Bouchard

to the end that you may be taken prisoner and carried far from Monterey, with Vara left here to head a new government and make himself dictator—king, perhaps."

More fiercely than ever did Sola drum at his table top. He was frowning like a sky thickening to thunder-clouds. Even now he was expecting Vara. It had been Vara's own suggestion that they visit together the *castillo* at the edge of the wood, making sure that all was in readiness there.

"If Vara be traitor, what of you, señor?" he snapped suddenly; his head came up with a jerk. "You who now turn against your own comrades?"

Captain Cavalier stiffened. It was amazing how stern his face could grow in an instant.

"I came to California in my own ship. A privateer, señor. I came understanding that your California, like other sister provinces in the South, was sick of Spanish dominion; that she was held to a steel heel and would gladly be free. I came thus as a friend, rather than as an enemy of California."

"And for no thought of loot?" jeered Sola.

"If there were plunder to be had, what of it, señor? You are an old soldier; you know, I'll wager, the way of spoils of war! But what have I found? A California content with things as they are. Were there two factions here, one shouting *Viva Fernando,* one crying *Viva Libertad,* there is small doubt but I should have found my way into the patriot camp. But there is only one faction. That is mine."

"And your former friends?"

"You yourself know how I cut myself free of my own crew, back there on the cove near the big *rancho.*

To-night, as I have told you, along with Vara I visited Bouchard. Bouchard and I had known each other and had quarrelled before. Yet I sought an alliance and——"

"An alliance with that pirate? This very night? And yet you now profess to be a friend to California?"

"I would remind Your Excellency," Captain Cavalier told him coolly, "that then I owed no allegiance whatever to your California. I had even fair cause for an opposite attitude, since you had ordered me shot," he added dryly. "My whole interest lay in one house; I would have lent a willing hand at the sacking of Monterey and asked no other share in booty——"

"The house of Don Hilario!"

Captain Cavalier bowed.

"Which also was wanted by Señor Vara. He meant to have a foot in either camp, come victory or defeat."

"And Bouchard?"

"Emulated Your Excellency. Ordered me shot. Behold, then, Captain Cavalier watching two camps bristle and himself no part of either. Behold how of a sudden he became *Californio!* If you will make use of my sword, señor, I vow that none other will show you greater loyalty."

"And if I do not? You return to your former friends?"

"Never, señor. I am done with them."

"What then?"

Captain Cavalier could only sigh. And then, before he could speak, came one in the most urgent haste from the house of Don Hilario. Not the soldier that Sola had sent, but Don Nicolas Vara himself.

His eyes, glaring about him, were like the eyes of

a madman. He rushed past the soldiers in the door and into the governor's room. His face was red; there was a cruel show of white teeth under his black moustache.

"So," he shouted angrily, "he is here, then! You have the dog, Don Pablo? *Por Dios*—let it be myself who gives the order to fire!"

Captain Cavalier found in this an occasion to treat them to that merry laughter of which no man was ever more fond or capable.

"Your hot wishes run away with you like wild horses, señor! But you come opportunely; we were just speaking of you, Don Pablo and I."

Sola was watching them both like a hawk.

"Captain Cavalier hinted at an ugly story, Don Nicolas. Something having to do with a priest who was no priest; with a maid falsely wedded. He promised me details of this if I would but send to Don Hilario's house. You come from there?"

"He lies!" cried Vara viciously, and then fell into a black silence, biting at his lips.

The darker grew Vara's frownings, the brighter Captain Cavalier's smiles. But when Vara said, "He lies!" a new quality crept into his smile. He turned toward Sola, saying quietly:

"Of your bounty, with the countless leagues of California at your disposal, will you grant us a little spot a dozen paces square? Where I may let the insults out of this little traitor by slipping some few inches of sword through him?"

"Gentlemen!" growled Sola in sudden anger. "Have I time now for your quarrels? Don Nicolas, it is not

enough to name him liar. What does he mean by so wild a tale?"

Vara glanced over his shoulder. Here came the soldier whom Sola had sent to Don Hilario's home upon this matter; he looked fairly stupid with the shock of that amazement which had burst upon him on hearing the few words he had heard while speeding on his errand. Yet his mouth was opening to spill out as best he could what he had learned. Therefore, striving for mastery over his own mood, Vara made his hasty explanation:

"'Tis a shameful thing to tell, Don Pablo. And to my shame I must confess that this man tricked me. He—he——"

"Go on, man," shouted Sola in high impatience. "What is this thing, and what did he do to trick you?"

"I choke over the telling," muttered Vara. But cleared his throat—as perhaps his brain—and went on vehemently. "I was to wed to-night; the Señorita Virginia Luisa, as Your Excellency knows. I made haste for a priest. It was dark. I met one, sent, as I see now, by this rascal; one who professed to be but come on the moment from Mexico, going to Carmelo; a priest by his talk, by his garb, speaking of letters for me as well as for others here. I thought nothing amiss in my haste. Then it was disclosed that I had to do with an impostor, one of this Captain Cavalier's own crowd, masquerading as a priest. One whom he had brought ashore from Bouchard's ships to play this rôle, to trick me, to make it appear to any that do not have a high regard to my honor that I was a man without honor."

Never was a man in greater perplexity than Don

Pablo Sola at this moment. He could but stare from one to the other while his anger mounted. He had need to be a Solomon in an affair of such mystification, and must remain to the end a hot-blooded Spaniard.

"*Demonio!*" he roared out at the two of them. "You drive me mad. Here you set me puzzles to work out when already I am half dead with the burden on me. If I knew which one of you lied now, I'd run my own sword through him."

Don Nicolas Vara, with one eyebrow lifted very high while the other drooped in sinister fashion, created the very picture of haughtiness and arrogance.

"Do you question the honor of Don Nicolas Vara?" he demanded. "Am I, confronted by an outlaw, a wretched pirate whom already you have ordered laid by the heels, dead or alive, to have my word questioned when opposed to his?"

"Have a care, señor!" It was plain that Captain Cavalier sought only to tease him. "You speak of one who is here at His Excellency's special command; under His Excellency's protection."

Vara was startled.

"Does this man for once speak truth, Don Pablo? Have you let him come here, a free man, to spy on us? Ah, no; incredible!"

"He sent word that he had important information," said Sola curtly. "In return I gave him my word to let him go free——"

"What!" Vara appeared unable or unwilling to believe his own ears. "You let him come to spy on us—to go back to his friends with his tale to tell! They know nothing of our strength here or weakness;

and you, Don Pablo, knowing this man for Captain Cavalier——"

"I did not know him for Captain Cavalier," growled the governor savagely. "A friend of Captain Cavalier; that was what I looked for. And quite a different matter," he grunted as his sombre eyes came to rest menacingly upon this impudent visitor who had been a thorn in his side long enough. "I had even the suspicion that he who asked entrance meant to deliver Captain Cavalier into my hands."

"He tricked you, then!" cried Vara with a gleam of craft in his burning eyes.

"Aye, in a way he tricked me——"

Captain Cavalier spoke up swiftly, little liking this new trend of affairs. For well he knew that there is nothing simpler than convincing any man in the direction he wishes most to be convinced.

"There come times, Excellency, when a man must perforce be his own best and truest friend! There was nothing but truth in my word sent to you. Nothing but truth in your word exchanged for mine. Between gentlemen there is nothing further to say. But there is this: it is almost dawn, and at dawn, as I have warned you, you can look for the attack. Am I to be honored by a position of trust among your defenders? If not, then it were best——"

What else the captain might have had to say was lost in a sudden uproar. The silence of the hushed hour heralding the new day was disrupted by the boom of cannon.

Sola leaped to his feet.

"Ho, there," he called to the squad of men just

outside his door, "put me this man in the guard-house! A prisoner of state until——"

They rushed in. A dozen muskets uncomfortably close were thrust toward Captain Cavalier.

"What?" he roared. "Is the word of honor of Don Pablo Sola——"

"Silence!" boomed Sola back at him. "I promised you your freedom; you shall have it. But at the moment of attack, can I waste time with you? Later, you shall come before me again. Off with him, *soldados!*"

Captain Cavalier quivered with rage. Yet, noting the excitement all about him and how hands were at tension about the many muskets, he refrained from that explosion which might have detonated a full dozen other explosions, and so have blown him out of a delectable world into a problematic one.

By now the cannons were hot at it. They were firing from the ship, and attack was being met with shot for shot.

Captain Cavalier, commanding himself, was being led away, bowing as he went. His last glance was at Vara's face. It gleamed with triumph; then most mysteriously clouded with perplexity.

"What guns are those?" demanded Vara, plainly puzzled. "Not from our *castillo*——"

"From our new battery on the beach," rejoined Sola, already running out. "Thrown up while you were away——"

So Captain Cavalier had his chance again to smile. Over his shoulder, walking jauntily again, he mocked:

"And you failed to report that to Frenchy Bouchard,

Señor Vara? He'll scarce thank you for the omission——"

But he was hustled into the *plaza*, and to a low, squat, tiled building. The door was unlocked; he was thrust through into a dark, close hole. He heard the enormous key turn again in the padlock.

"Well, either in haste or in courtesy, they left me my weapons!" Here on the instant he summoned back his pleasant outlook upon murky businesses. "But the devil's in this affair, just the same," he muttered as an afterthought. "To sit like a mole in his tunnel when the trumpets blare—I'd be the better for my log on the edge of the wood."

And then, being far less a philosopher in words than in deeds, he began to feel his way about in the dark, already thinking of escape.

He heard a sound close by. For it he grew rigid, ignoring the crash and boom outside the walls. He had company here, then? A familiar sound that; the unsteady knocking of cup and bottle neck; a pleasant gurgle followed by the smell of wine.

"Here's one who takes his misfortunes with philosophy," chuckled Captain Cavalier. "I can learn from him."

And without awaiting the swiftly coming light of day, he set about to make the acquaintance of that certain Molina who was here because he had the misfortune to resemble Don Pablo Sola.

CHAPTER XV

CANNONS crashed; the jug gurgled. Captain Cavalier frowned; Molina drank. Captain Cavalier fumed at being shut up here at such an hour; Molina meditated mistily that, with unseasonable weather prevailing outside, here was the very king of places for a man to sit snug and guzzle.

Boom, crash, and boom again. Clink, gurgle, and clink.

"Ho! there, comrade," said Captain Cavalier. "Who are you?"

"Me?" returned a placid voice. "I'm Molina. Have a drink?"

"Later, perhaps. Why are you locked in here?"

"For being drunk, señor."

"And for punishment they give you the liquor for deeper drunkenness?"

"I have friends. Forced to lock me up, they still treat me well."

"You are a happy man!"

"Oh, I am content here. It storms outside. You can hear the thunder."

"The thunder of guns, man! Monterey is attacked."

"So much the better to be here. Storm or battle, here is quiet."

"It is all one to you if Monterey falls?"

"But Monterey cannot fall, señor."

Captain Cavalier snorted.

"And, pray, why not?"

"Because, señor, that would be impossible."

They grew silent by mutual consent, Molina lapped in the most serene unconcern, Captain Cavalier with much to ponder. He hearkened to the sounds penetrating through the small grilled window; they were all that were to be vouchsafed him of this first phase of the battle. Once he heard Sola's deep voice bellowing commands; once he heard a burst of wild cheering; the guns kept up their savage duet.

The newly improvised battery on the beach was doing all the work for Monterey at this juncture. He marked that the guns of the *castillo* were strangely silent. At first he puzzled over that; then the explanation leaped upon him. Bouchard had sent at least one ship, the smaller *Santa Rosa* with its lesser draft, no doubt, close under the shore during the night. Thus it was that Bouchard counted on creeping under the guns of Monterey and making his conquest in one savage blow, a thing which might have come to pass but for those other guns, of which he had no knowledge, down near the water's edge.

Now and then, as the bombardment continued, the *castillo* joined in the fray, seeking to drop its missiles upon the *fragata chica*. But the real blow was struck back from the beach. And, as Captain Cavalier began to understand, that blow was struck to some advantage.

Already, with a thinnish light spreading in the confines of the jail, it must be broad daylight in the open. Men could see clearly what they were about. Now came another ringing cheer from the defenders.

"They've made a hit this time," Cavalier muttered, far less to his companion than to himself. "Man, man, I'd give a thousand *pesos* to be out there with them!"

"Viva Fernando!" said Molina thickly, and drank loyally to his king.

Captain Cavalier, growing steadily more restless as the thunder of the guns kept up, began a methodical study of his prison. The place was made for such petty offenders as Molina, a crude affair of earthen walls; give him a few hours' time, unmolested, and he would find the way to dig out. With the day brightening even in this gloomy place he went up and down, seeking the most likely place for the beginning.

An hour passed thus. He found his spot; near a corner where a cot stood, close to the ground was an inviting crack in the old adobes. He pricked experimentally at the earthen bricks with his dagger and made his thoughtful estimate: the walls would be two or three feet thick, yet if a man worked diligently a day should suffice to tunnel through one of them.

Molina, lying upon an old blanket, was beyond taking the slightest interest in what his cell-mate did. But Cavalier meant to make sure of him; who knew but that the fellow, when his jailers came with his breakfast, would be of a mind to indicate his staunch loyalty by doing a bit of blabbing?

"Look you, Molina," began Cavalier, standing over him.

Molina grunted and rolled over, staring up vacantly. And Captain Cavalier, seeing him clearly for the first time, was considerably startled. Could one imagine Don Pablo Sola in such an environment and such a physical condition of rags and tatters and drunkenness, why then, there lay His Excellency at his feet on the dirty blanket!

"May the devil roast me if I ever had such a start,"

admitted Captain Cavalier, half frowning and half laughing. "Why, man, you are the most unlovely picture of Don Pablo himself."

"Eh?" demanded Molina, blinking. "No, no, señor. Anyway, it's no fault of mine. I had no hand in it; I swear I meant no insult——"

"Oho, so Don Pablo has noticed it? And is little pleased?"

"Sometimes the boys laugh and name me Don Pablo. Just for sport, señor. Then if His Excellency hears of it, he locks me up. *Viva Fernando! Viva Sola!*"

There had been a moment's lull in the firing. Now the guns were at it again, inspired to some new frenzy. One could hear the balls from the *Santa Rosa* falling on all hands; now and then there was the crash and splinter of one tearing through a tiled roof. There was even a rattle of musketry now and then; cheer after cheer rose through the deeper reverberations. Captain Cavalier fairly tingled.

"My *Californios* fight with spirit," he muttered a score of times. And each time went back to his work at the adobe wall with renewed eagerness.

Another hour passed, and then came a sudden and definite cessation of firing. Captain Cavalier left his task, concealed the beginning of his tunnel by dragging the cot against the wall, and repaired to the barred window looking into the *presidio plaza*. He saw a squad of soldiers pass; they tossed their guns up and shouted their triumphant *vivas*. Again he heard Sola's great rumbling voice; even some few words came to him. It, too, sounded triumphant. Captain Cavalier, who could not understand that victory had

been won in two hours' cannon battle, was all burning curiosity.

A third hour passed in silence. Then again he heard the tread of soldiers; they came now straight to the door of the jail. The big key turned in the lock, the door swung open—and with a sudden spurt of expectancy he looked to see the governor himself, come to keep his word and set him free. Instead he saw three men thrust forward through the door and the door shut and locked after them.

In one glance Captain Cavalier disposed of two of these new entrants: a palpable sailor of mixed bloods and a grinning negro. But the third held his look and caught his interest. This was a breezy young man, not over thirty, in a tattered uniform of a sort, keen-faced and intelligent. But the thing which made Captain Cavalier warm to him from the outset was the fact that without question here came another American!

"Captain Cavalier, Virginian, and at your service, sir."

"Joseph Chapman, born and bred New Englander, jack of all trades, and glad to know you, sir," smiled the other.

"Late of Bouchard's crew? And now a prisoner of war?" asked Captain Cavalier.

"Something of that sort sir," returned Joseph Chapman.

"You don't mean that the attack is over so soon?"

"The first of it only, I fear. You see, we had information of their defenses; but knew nothing of that battery down by the sea. In the affair of this morning, California wins."

"You will tell me about it?"

Chapman did so willingly enough. He was of the *Santa Rosa's* crew. They had drawn close in during the night; had fired the first gun at dawn. But those fellows on the beach had surprised them. The *Santa Rosa* had lost several men, killed and wounded; she had her rigging pretty well messed up for her and a hole or two in her hull that would require a bit of tinkering before ever she was seaworthy again. Two hellish hot hours of it had been enough for her, even with her guns, greatly outnumbering those on shore. For, to begin with, it was Hypolite Bouchard's desire to take this little post without any particular loss to himself.

Therefore just now the *Santa Rosa* had hauled down her flag. But her men had put off in boats to go to the commander's ship. Sola had demanded that they send her officer ashore; they had informed him that Lieutenant Corney had already gone to the *Argentina*. Upon Sola's insistence that they send the officer in command, threatening to open fire again, this Joseph Chapman, with the sailor and the negro, had come ashore.

"And glad to do it, sir," said Chapman, his bright eyes twinkling. "Between you and me I had had enough of sailing with Frenchy Bouchard. I told the Spanish governor as much; how I had sailed unwillingly all the while, being impressed at the Islands. And he, having named me seven kinds of a liar, sent me here."

"The attack will continue, then?"

"Of course. But, I think and I have told the governor, after a different fashion. Bouchard hardly looked for any resistance. Now, seeing he has a fight

for it, he'll make sure next time. He's got the men and he's got the guns."

"You mean he will land an overwhelming detachment and march on the *presidio?*"

"Exactly. Then there can be no doubt of the outcome. And in such a blow Frenchy Bouchard knows that his losses will be little. They'll have to surrender here, sir, or be shot down to the last man."

"Did Governor Sola, by any chance, make any reference to me?"

"Not in my presence. I heard him bark an order or two; say to an officer that he was going to make the rounds in person, to see that everything was shipshape; then go take a sleep in readiness for whatever might turn up next. I imagine there wasn't much sleeping done ashore last night?"

"Look here, Mr. Chapman; are you of a mind to sit here awaiting the result of the next bit of fighting? Or do you want to go free?"

"You mean that you count on escape from this place?"

"Frankly, as between Americans, yes. Are you with me? We'd wait for dark, of course; then make a run for it."

He was no little put aback when the other shook his head.

"Make your own plans without me, captain. I'll not interfere, of course, and I'll undertake that my men don't betray you. But for my part, I'll stay. Sounds strange? Well, I told a straight story to the governor, and though he pooh-poohed me, I feel that he knows it. He'll hold me a prisoner of war a few days, a few weeks possibly. Then he'll let me go.

And I am of a mind to make a home here. Now, if I bolted with you, where would I go? Back to Bouchard? I'd rather not! Where else? I couldn't leave California, even if I wanted to; and I'd find it hard remaining, a fugitive and under suspicion. No, thanks; I'll stay and take my chances with this Sola of yours. So just forget that—— Sink me seven fathoms!" he cried out, having his first glance at Molina. "I've heard there's witchcraft in this California, but——"

Captain Cavalier left him to his wonderment and returned to his work in the far corner.

It would appear that no one remembered the prisoners. Not until high noon did a squad of soldiers open the door long enough to bring food and water and even a couple of bottles of wine. Captain Cavalier heard them coming, and made haste to hide his excavation with the cot and his own body. He asked for news and demanded again to be taken before Sola. They told him that His Excellency was asleep and had commanded them to awaken him only if attack were threatened.

"Have all the citizens gone?" he asked.

"Yes; after the fighting this morning there were only the soldiers left. The ladies had at last departed. They took a wounded man with them, Don Hilario. . . ."

So Virginia Luisa's father was hurt? Captain Cavalier asked details, and was told that a cannon ball striking a building had hurled a broken tile so that it struck Don Hilario in the head. He was bleeding, unconscious when they put him into a *careta* and started for the Rancho del Rey with him.

"His wife and daughter with him?"

"*Si*, señor."

At least it was a relief to know that at last Virginia Luisa had fled doomed Monterey. For still he held it doomed.

He bethought him of Vara; of the look of suspicion on Sola's face; of his own parting shot concerning the beach battery. Had Sola's suspicions flowered or died?

"What of Don Nicolas Vara?" he asked.

The soldier looked puzzled.

"In the fighting His Excellency despatched him to the *castillo* for a word with Gomez, who commands there. There must have been some misunderstanding of orders, for the next thing Gomez ordered the battery to cease firing on the pirate ship. They would not stop, and Gomez turned the *castillo's* guns on our own battery! Some say that Gomez is a traitor, having a nephew with Bouchard's men. But I know better than that, señor! There are others who say that Señor Vara was the traitor, carrying lying orders from our governor. *Quién sabe?*" he ended with a shrug.

"And Vara, what does he say?"

"No one has seen him since, señor. Some say he is dead, struck down by a ball outside; some others say he has deserted to the enemy."

For his own part, Captain Cavalier had small doubt: Vara, during the battle, had made the mistake of thinking that Monterey must fall immediately, and had sought by a characteristic bit of treachery to hasten matters. Thereafter, having shown his hand, there was nothing left for him but to go to the other camp. He, too, without doubt had seen that piercing glance from Sola.

Well, here were things to think upon, and he went

back to his labors with renewed energy. For a time all went well; he dug swiftly in the earthen wall, scooping the dirt away with both hands. Then he came to a big rock, set in the adobe and exactly where he would have given most not to have it. He couldn't budge it, so was it held by still other rocks and earth; all that he could do was dig at the side. When the dark of the dreary winter afternoon invaded the place he was still far from his labor's end.

Now and again came interruptions when he must hasten to hide what he did, and throw himself down on his cot and wait impatiently for the opportunity to resume his task. The soldiers brought supper; every hour or so some one of them would come to the grated window to peer in curiously upon them, to taunt the newer captives, to while away a period of tedium with question and speculation.

Through the night, while the others slept as best they could, he worked on. It was harder than ever now to make progress; a bit of light would have been as welcome as an extra pair of hands. Yet he stuck to it doggedly hour after hour. What débris he loosened of soil and stones he drew into the room, concealing it as best he could. He grew both weary and heavy with sleep; a time or two he dozed off, and dreamed himself free and hastening along toward the Rancho del Rey!

The wall was thicker than he had thought it. Yet sometime between midnight and dawn he thrust an arm through, having pressed head and shoulder into the more generous excavation on the near side of his wall, and felt the cool air and a spattering of raindrops. He worked now with quickened hopes.

But again he encountered difficulties. Rocks seemed

embedded with a most devilish and profligate generosity through the wall. These were no true adobe bricks at all; rather in making the *presidio* walls the builders had both strengthened and hastened the finished product by lining up boulders as large as they could handle, plastering them over and filling the spaces between with the hard packed soil. Two or three times, thinking his task done, he found such impenetrable and immovable obstacles barring his way.

He dozed again. His fingers were stiff and sore, his hands bruised and torn. His one longing now was to get clear and slip into the edge of the wood; once there he would go on to a certain hiding-place, throw himself down, and get his fill of sleep.

He started wide awake. A drum was beating. He lay flat and peered through the narrow, inadequate tunnel he had made. It was still dark outside, yet he sensed the coming of the dawn. Again he resumed his fury of scratching.

He could hear a murmur of bustling. The garrison began to stir. They breakfasted, no doubt; they prepared for the new day. And if he were not gone before that day really came, what hope had he?

He tried now squeezing his body into the hole. Slender though he was, yet he had too great a width of shoulder to please him at such a time. He fell to enlarging the opening; digging out stones which jutted into it like fangs. Now he tried again; he could almost make it. Give him another half an hour—another fifteen minutes——

Again he tried squeezing his body through the hole. It was terribly tight, yet he wriggled desperately. He got his arms through; caught hold with his hands

and drew himself along. He at last had his head through.

The darkness was dissolving slowly into thin pale light. The sun must by now be tipping a murky horizon, but the clouds obscuring the sky and the air, thick with a moisture which was half sea fog and half rain, stole from day to extend the term of night. Now was his time; he must hasten or the watchful sentinels would see him.

There was a sudden flurry of hoofbeats; here, spurring in wild haste, came a rider straight to the presidial gate. Captain Cavalier twisted and strained to see, but could but glimpse and lose again the speeding rider. The gate was flung open; the horse dashed through; the gate closed.

"Some sentinel bringing word that the landing party attacks!" was his swift decision.

And he started to pull himself through. But again there was the hammer of hoofs; here came another rider, shouting out at the top of his lungs. A drum boomed out in the *presidio;* the sharp clear notes of a bugle sounded. Dimly he heard Don Pablo Sola's voice. The gate was flung open again, and though the second rider had sped through, the gate remained wide. Now all was din and uproar. Bouchard's landing party was arriving. He could hear a burst of savage shouts; he could make out a blurred mass which broke up into many running forms. A score—a hundred—two or three hundred men sweeping along the slope, bent on surrounding the *presidio* and making short work of what they had to do.

The *presidio* gate filled with horsemen; Monterey's soldiery was riding out for the last blow—and, inevita-

bly, for retreat. There was no withstanding that yelling horde with a bare two-score men.

He saw Sola at their fore, his sword flung up, his white hair uncovered. He saw Bouchard's men rushing on, a horrible motley; men from all the seven ports, Islanders virtually naked brandishing musket and sword and pike; negroes, Chinese, with here and there a white man. American or English or French or Spanish?

There was a great, long-echoing explosion; a powder magazine had been fired rather than be left to these vandals. There was a rattle of gunfire; attackers and attacked grew still for one electric moment and poured hot lead across the distance separating them.

Still they came on, score after score. The daylight brightened. Here on their frightened horses sat Monterey's few defenders; yonder, in a seething mob, came Bouchard's invaders.

Captain Cavalier heard a sound behind him. They were opening the jail; they had remembered their prisoners. He crept through and stood free, his sword in hand, his body tight pressed against the wall. He heard a sound of puffing and grunting; here, after him, came the drunken Molina.

Sola shouted an order. His men lifted their guns, fired point blank into the thickest of the attack, shouted, wheeled their horses and were gone.

Bouchard's men were of necessity on foot, and therefore could not even dream of pursuit. But they swarmed everywhere; they surrounded the *presidio;* they began pouring through the gate. Marking them, Captain Cavalier thought that he knew the man who was first through. It was Sir Harry Hawk.

Molina stared, grunted, dropped on his hands and knees and went back through the hole. Just in time he had seen a squad of men turning the corner, coming this way.

In as savage a mood as had ever visited him in his life, Captain Cavalier followed the drunkard's example. Nor was he an instant too soon. He had barely gotten his boots through when he heard the men outside go tramping by.

CHAPTER XVI

Had it been allowed Captain Cavalier to know who was that first rider who had sped in through the *presidio* gate, and could he further have guessed that this one person alone now remained with all Monterey deserted, it is extremely more than likely that he would not have lived out the hour. For it was Virginia Luisa. And while he now sought to hide and grumbled the while, she, half dead with fear, was riding within the same great enclosure.

How their fates seemed to drag them along toward their own tragic undoing! She had fled nearly twenty-four hours ago, as he had heard. Governor Sola had issued his final orders that all leave; more than that, her father had been brought into the house, bloody and unconscious, and at first she had thought him dead. There had been a moment of panic, but her mother, though she turned deadly white, remained calm and issued her own orders, exacting as swift an obedience as the governor received.

A bed was prepared in the *careta;* oxen were yoked; within ten minutes the little cavalcade started toward the distant Rancho del Rey. All went on horseback, saving alone Don Hilario on his bed, and his wife, who rode at his side.

Thus after their long, hard ride they arrived at the encampment on the Salinas where already other refugees had gathered, and where the garrison, if forced to evacuate, would follow.

"Here we stay until your father is better," said Doña Manuela calmly. "Then we take him on to the *rancho* of your grandfather Don Julian."

"He isn't—going—to die?" whispered Virginia Luisa, her tears running down her pale cheeks.

"It is not a question of such a thing!" said her mother sharply. "I will not let him die."

And when word went about that Doña Manuela had said that she would not let her husband die, people found themselves ceasing to worry greatly about his condition. They knew from experience that what this lady said should be done was always done.

That night Virginia Luisa slept heavily. Her mother awakened her once, bidding her get up and go for some brandy which Don Hilario needed. She arose and went to where some of the men were sitting up about a fire, smoking and drinking and talking of all these untoward events. And as she came upon them it chanced that they were speaking of Captain Cavalier.

They gave her the brandy, and she went back to her mother with it. Then she sat on the edge of her rude bed of straw and blanket, and fell to thinking, to remembering, and finally to sighing. She wondered where Captain Cavalier was this dark, cold night; how it fared with him. Just what was it that the men by the fire had said?

She returned to them, saying quietly:

"What did you say of Captain Cavalier, 'Tonio?"

He laughed. He had been one of the men at the *presidio* when Captain Cavalier came demanding word with Sola. He told how Sola had thrown him into jail. And in jail he still was when they had left Monterey. Some thought that the governor, with the

battle on his hands, had forgotten him. Certainly there was none who had cared to remind him——

She stared, horrified.

"You mean," she gasped, "that he may still be shut up there? Forgotten?"

The man shrugged.

"Why not, señorita? He is only a pirate, after all. We don't want him; maybe his friends——"

A little cry broke from her as she whirled and ran back to her mother.

"Mama, mama!" she cried. "They have locked Captain Cavalier up in jail back there at Monterey! If he is not freed—if the pirates capture Monterey—*they will kill him!*"

Her mother looked at her long and intently.

"What have we to do with this man?" she asked sharply.

"He is so wonderful! And—oh, they will kill him," wailed Virginia Luisa, her hands twisting before her, her eyes large with anguish.

Her mother's lips were shut tight.

"Ah! It were best if they did kill him," she returned in anger. "Go to bed, child."

"But——"

"Sh! Your father needs quiet."

With head drooping Virginia Luisa withdrew. She began weeping afresh; again memory snared her, drew her back into the presence of this man whom, it seemed, the whole world struck at; showed him to her as she had first seen him, as she had last seen him. He had been good to her; he had saved her from worse than death; he had made her love him. And now she sat weeping while he lay in a cell at Monterey. . . .

She shuddered and moaned. She left the past to stare at the future. What if the pirates took Monterey? There was that vicious Sir Harry Hawk. There was Bouchard, who had ordered Cavalier shot. There was Vara, who, as Cavalier himself had told her, was a friend to these men. She fancied that she saw them opening the jail door. . . .

Just as she dared not tell her mother, so she dared not tell any one what she meant to do, what she must do; every hand would be lifted to stop her. She slipped out in the dark, alone; she found a horse in the corral, and for the first time in her life put on a saddle. Then she mounted, turned back toward Monterey and rode.

"Don Pablo must have forgotten him," she told herself a thousand times. "For, else, he would never have broken his word like this. I have only to tell him, and he will be the first to run to the jail. He will have to set him free."

She was frightened to ride alone; yet she beat her fears down, reminding herself what dangers he had dared for her sake. She was wet with the rain, cold, already weary. Yet she rode on steadily and as swiftly as she could in the dark. For the most part she let her horse choose the way.

Do her best, the day was breaking when she saw the dull walls of the *presidio*. She dashed at the gate, and they saw who it was and stood aside, wondering, as she shot into the *plaza*. She jumped down, turning her horse loose, calling to the first soldier:

"I want Don Pablo. Where is he? Tell me, quick?"

"Why, in his rooms," said the man. "That is, I think—— Wait! He is——wait! Wait, señorita——"

But she had not heard him half through. She sped across the *plaza,* under the long corridors and to Sola's door. Doubtless he was asleep, but his sleep must be broken. She knocked loudly.

A drum was beating, but that meant nothing to her. She had heard so much drum-beating of late! She but knocked the louder and, when there was no answer, tried the door, found it unlocked, and went in.

In the pitch dark she called softly and then loudly:

"Don Pablo. Don Pablo. It is I, Virginia Luisa——"

Still no answer. All the while that growing rumble outside. She ran to a window and jerked aside the heavy curtain; a little pale light entered. She saw that the room was deserted and hastened into the next. Here again she called; another curtain was swept aside. This was Sola's bedroom. But, though the bed covers were tumbled every way, there was no one here.

She turned to go back. At the moment there was a more sinister sound: a bugle blowing, a man shouting, then a volley of musket shots. She stood where she was, paralyzed. They were fighting at the gate!

The men were mounted. They were making their last stand. There was such a din of yelling as must come from the throats of attackers a thousand strong. This was the end. Sola meant to withdraw——

She ran into the *plaza* and toward the gate. It remained open, and she saw Sola's little band in the gateway and, beyond them, the half-naked, shrieking devils who stormed Monterey.

"Don Pablo!" she screamed.

But Sola faced the other way. He gave his last command. In the uproar he could not hear her. His little

body of horse, spattering mud, was off at a furious gallop. . . .

She stood uncertain; she could stir neither hand nor foot. All the world, a dizzy, darkening world, seemed to swarm with naked savages. They came on, shouting, yelling, brandishing their weapons, firing their guns in the air, jeering. . . .

Had they seen her already? Her strength came back to her, borne along on a fresh tidal wave of terror. She turned and ran again, this time back into Sola's rooms. To hide somewhere; that was her only living instinct. To find a place to hide. . . .

She was in the room again, the door shut. Already the *plaza* was filling. Men shouted and laughed and went rushing this way and that, each eager to be the first to whatever brand of loot they might discover. She heard doors banged back. A rush of footsteps came toward her. . . .

Above the din now rose a clear, bugling voice which could belong to but one man on earth: the voice of Sir Harry Hawk. Even above the crash of axes thudding against doors that voice shrilled and vibrated. It seemed not a score of paces away. It jeered, triumphed, gloated. It came on, closer; she could hear now the rush of his feet. Had he seen her? Had those bright blue eyes, as sharp as knives and as evil as poison, seen her?

She looked wildly about. Oh, if she could but have gotten to her father's house! Then there would have been a chance to hide; she could think only of the cellar, hidden under a floor board, where Don Hilario stored the most precious of his vintages. . . . Like a flash at her need, with this thought suggesting the

next, she remembered that secret closet which she had seen Sola open the other day when he sought his field-glass.

She darted into the narrow hall connecting parlor and bedroom. The tiny-doored closet stood open, the panel thrust back. She slipped in; she could barely squeeze herself into the tiny space let into the thick adobe wall.

Again that bugling voice rose clear and sinister. Harry Hawk was at Sola's front door, his hand on the latch. She found herself entangled in garments hung on little pegs; a cloak tumbled about her shoulders; she tripped over a pair of boots. She tried to close the panel after her. It seemed to catch; she struggled with it frantically. The front door was opening; she caught a glimpse of Harry Hawk standing in the threshold. But, God be thanked, still one more moment was granted her, since he stood with his back half turned, calling orders to the surging mob outside. She pulled again, more frantically than ever. The panel moved, caught again, slid into place.

And now she dared not move. She was in a tiny thick-walled cell; it was close here and musty; the air was so heavy that she could scarcely breathe it into her laboring lungs. It was as dark as pitch. She leaned back against the wall, her senses reeling.

Sir Harry Hawk strode into Don Pablo Sola's reception room, sword in one hand, pistol in the other. He stood with legs far apart, staring about him, his little eyes gloating, his mouth twisted in a sneer. He saw a crystal vase set beside a half-dozen books on a little shelf; with a sweep of his sword he sent them to the floor, the vase splintering. Before him was that im-

ported table which had been Sola's pride; Harry Hawk struck it in turn, gouging its polished surface. There was a rug on the floor; he kicked it into a corner.

From the parlor he went swaggering into the bedroom. She could hear his elbow brush her panel as he went by; his sword left a long scratch here too. In the bedroom he began tumbling things about; tossing covers to the floor and leaving muddy tracks on them; shoving the bed out to look under it and behind.

From here he went on into a third room. Faintly there came to her the sound of clinking glass. He had found a little pantry and in it some of the rarest wine and brandy that had ever come into Monterey.

She heard him return to the parlor, singing under his breath a gay little song whose words in any voice were enough to set one shivering. He cast himself down in Sola's favorite chair, put his heels on the table and helped himself generously to a draught from the neck of the bottle. Then without stirring he began bugling orders again.

Kanaka George, by this time become Sir Harry's chief lieutenant, appeared at the first summons, a couple of ragged birds of prey at his back.

"You're keeping an eye on that fellow Vara?" demanded Harry Hawk.

Kanaka George nodded and grinned.

"He's a dirty blackguard," Sir Harry went on, drinking deep, wiping his lips and drinking again. "I'd slit his gullet for him on the instant, but he may be used to help us find things of value hidden here. So you are not to let him out of sight, George."

"They're looting all the houses," was the swift rejoinder. "I have a mind to lend a hand, Captain."

"You've earned the sweet privilege," cried Sir Harry heartily. "But business, man, ever before pleasure! There are those two Indians we caught; servants to some rich don here, I'll be bound. You've put them where I can get my hands on them when I'm ready?"

"In the jail, Captain. We found it open; the key in the lock. I shoved the two inside, locked the door, and have the key here——"

"Give it me," commanded Sir Harry. "And go do your looting."

There was the clank of the heavy key tossed to the table top; then the scurry of the Kanaka's swift departure.

All the while the uproar grew. Discipline was relaxed; every man went his own way; vandalism spread throughout the *presidio,* spilled over and ransacked the extra-mural warehouses, ran like a muddy millstream into the private homes. One did not try a door to see if it were locked: instead an axe flashed up and down and made it into splinters. Bouchard's half-naked Islanders began to clothe themselves as they ran; one in a rich wide hat, one in a pair of pantaloons, one in a cloak with a scarlet lining. If a man found a silver cup or a yard of Spanish lace or a carved candlestick, he made it his own in a wild scramble and went rushing on, trampling underfoot all that he had no use for.

Some one found a hogshead of wine and in an instant they swarmed about it like flies. They ran through the church, leaving a trail of desecration behind them; they cut at the Beautiful Lady with their cutlasses as they dashed by; they even dashed up the

narrow stairs into the tower, questing they knew not what.

Monterey, long prepared for the invasion, had removed her most cherished belongings. Yet there remained much which could not be taken; and there had been those who would never believe that California's capital could ever fall into the enemy's hands. So there was much to take now, much to appropriate and much to destroy. Fine old furniture was dragged out of doors; a heap of it was made in the centre of the *plaza;* there would be a bonfire to-night to be seen far out at sea! Even the gardens, that pretty little orchard which had been the pride of Don Pedro Fages forty years before, all were ruined.

What a mighty roar went up into the weeping skies when Don Nicolas Vara led the way to a certain hidden cellar! They rolled forth the kegs and brought up the bottles. A couple of their crowd came running at the *presidio* gate driving a stupefied beef cow. They struck the poor beast down with axes, let out its blood, and raucously invited all California to come to the feast! A fire was lighted; each man took his own joy in tossing to it some bit of wreckage which was of no value to him yet which he evilly meant to cheat Monterey of having; a mahogany table, a picture from the church, a beautifully carved wooden image, all went to the fire.

Sir Harry Hawk had thirsted long in this California; had but whetted that thirst these last two nights in Monterey; was half drunk now, but meant to be drunk to the final degree of absoluteness before he was done. They had cheated him of his prey in allowing Sola to escape; while he drank he cursed Vara for a liar and

a cheat. They had robbed him of his señoritas; he cursed Vara for that, too. But they had left him the finest of fine brandies, and he made his most of them. Later he would bestir himself; if these fellows stumbled on golden double doubloons, he meant to have his share of them. There would be dice rolling before the day was done; aye, and there would likely be steel unsheathed from leather to be resheathed in flesh. Oh, he'd have his share, a captain's share, and trust Sir Harry Hawk for that!

Virginia Luisa, crouching in the little closet, could barely breathe now. No fresh air came in here; she felt that soon she must smother, lose consciousness, sink into a black faint which led to death. But better that, better a thousand times, than open the door for air. . . .

Yet how tenacious youth is of life! Gasping for breath, her heart beating heavily, she dared even what she feared most. She pressed close to the panel, her cheek against it; she set her trembling hands to move it just the distance of a single hair's width. She managed a crack as thin as a sheet of paper; she drew a long breath, deep and silent and grateful. She managed to peer through. . . .

There, just to be glimpsed through the hall, sat Sir Harry Hawk. His feet were on the table; he had his sword in his left hand now and a dusty bottle in his right. She shuddered, breathed deeply again, and slowly closed the panel.

He began singing that wicked song of his again; for deep-lunged accompaniment he had the outside uproar and din. She knew when he finished his bottle; she heard it flung across the room with all his might. He

got to his feet; he struck the table again with his sword, splintering it; he brushed by her, going for another bottle. Presently he came back. He stopped in the hall. He stood here a moment, leaning against her panel.

After a century he went back to the parlor.

Then she heard some one else come in.

Her first sensation was one of stimulating gladness. It was Don Nicolas Vara. Villain he might be, yet here was a man whom she had known for a full year, who had visited at her mother's house, who had sat at table with her a hundred times. He could not be utterly villainous; certainly not such a man to dread as Sir Harry Hawk. It was almost like a dear friend coming.

But her gladness seeped out of her and left her more hopeless than ever. In her desperation she had come dangerously near calling out to him; after the first few words she feared him as greatly as she did the other.

"How now, Vara!" cried Hawk truculently. "You've made me a pretty mess of things."

"I?" returned Vara haughtily. "'Tis you who have marred everything. You let your men go astray when we needed them most; you thereby postponed the attack——"

"It was that thrice-accursed Cavalier," growled Harry Hawk.

"Rather it was you who let him make a fool of you——"

Hawk hammered the table with his bottle.

"Talk softly with me, my traitor friend," he threatened, "or it will be the worse for you. Where's my

fine booty you pledged me? Where's this Sola you vowed to put into my hands? Where the big-eyed señoritas that were to be my prize? You've lied to me——"

"*Por Dios!*" cried Vara, hot with anger. "It was your own muddling of matters."

Harry Hawk was leering at him with eyes which rapidly grew red-rimmed.

"Have a care, Don Spaniard! You know who is leader here now——"

"Not you! It is that Peter Corney, the English right hand of Bouchard——"

Silver mocking laughter cut him short.

"Peter Corney, forsooth! What, man, don't you know? Bouchard has given all hands holiday; he makes free men of his crews and sets them ashore or lets them dawdle on shipboard, at their best likings. Peter Corney, finding the birds flown here and most things carried away, is back to his ship. Ah, but he's a friend of mine; a most sweet friend. He says to me, 'Harry, we'll not burden the bully boys with discipline to-day; give them a wide latitude to sail in. But you will be here in my absence; and, if a leader is needed, you are the man.' Aha; and how like you that, friend Vara?"

"Cursed little, if 'tis true," muttered Vara, and stalked out.

Now Sir Harry Hawk sprang nimbly to his feet.

"I give you free of the *presidio*," he bugled. "But not beyond, my Don Nick. I've a dozen men to follow you with their eyes. Traitor to California, traitor to me for a handful of coins."

Vara made some muffled rejoinder and went away. He was uneasy; his voice told that. As well he might be.

The day dragged on, a day of hell for the girl immured in the closet. Men came in, talked with Sir Harry, and went out. He himself was gone for a long time, and she again slid the panel cautiously back and drank in the air thirstily. She heard some one coming and again closed it.

She explored with her hands the depths of the closet. It was scarcely over two feet deep; it extended some four or five feet long. The panel door was slightly nearer one end than the other; hence by pressing her body tight in the furthest corner she was able to withdraw from the opening some three feet altogether. When she heard footsteps at Sola's front door, she crouched back here, to the screen of the utter dark adding that of the cloak and other garments hanging from the wooden pegs. When she dared, she moved quietly, her cheek against the panel, the panel slipped back that wee fraction of an inch which made breathing something less of an agony.

As the slow hours passed she had to battle with her fears to keep the dimmest spark of hope alive. Sir Harry Hawk appeared to be drinking steadily; no doubt the other men followed his example. When night came, if night ever came again for her, bringing its most welcome dark, she must try to slip out. She would wait until it grew quiet; she would pray God to plunge these fiends deep in a drunken stupor; she would take her life in her hands and attempt her desperate escape.

Even during this hideous time how insistently Cap-

tain Cavalier kept coming back into her thoughts. She recalled how he had made his escape from her father's house. Had he not thus shown her the way? If she donned Sola's great cloak, drew on his boots, found something to throw over her head, might she not pass unnoticed in all this motley crowd?

If only they did not find this closet! If only the secret of the panel could escape notice a few hours longer!

Slowly, each a period of torture both mentally and physically, the hours passed. She heard in horror the deep sea songs and deep sea curses of that type of men who foregathered with such as Sir Harry Hawk. At times the little parlor was filled to overflowing with them. They drank and jested; they broke bottles and quarrelled; some tossed down ringing coins and wagered over them. Once there was a curse, a blow, a shrill scream, and the sound of a body falling. Thereafter a moment of silence, and then the complacent grunting of Sir Harry Hawk, very drunk and very venomous now, rifling a man's pockets. It was very long, even after the room quieted, before she dared return to the panel for a breath of air.

All day long Captain Cavalier had had a place in her thoughts. She wondered, frightened by her own fancies, what had happened to him. Had Sola remembered and set him free, as he must have done had he remembered? Or had these others found him, dragged him forth and put him to death, as they would surely do at Harry Hawk's orders if they found him? Or did he still lie there in the jail into which so hastily the big Kanaka had thrust the captured Indians? Oh, dear God, how she longed for him now!

She saw how men came into Sola's apartments only with Sir Harry Hawk or at his invitation. He had set the place aside for his own headquarters. He would sleep here, no doubt, to-night. Alone, in the bedroom? Then she would have her chance to flee! Or would he have his own men about him? Would the place be full of them, sleeping on the floors, in all the rooms?

It began to grow dark; the most welcome dark in the world. She moved a little; she began to wonder if she could ever walk, run again, so stiffened and cramped were her muscles from these many hours of confinement. She grew dizzy and faint; how she longed for a glass, a great brimming glass of water. Never in her pampered life had she known until now just what was meant by thirst, that acute thirst which grips one by the parched throat, tortures, and near maddens.

She started. Voices again in the parlor. Had she been sleeping? Had she swooned? It was Sir Harry Hawk and his lieutenant, the Kanaka.

"You've kept an eye on Vara?"

"Aye, Captain. Our boys watch him now."

"He's slippery, curse him," muttered Hawk. His voice was no longer clear and bugle-like; drink had thickened it. A new stuttering quality invaded it; as though fully aware of his condition, he spoke very slowly, making little pauses between his words.

"He'll try to give me the slip. Go get him, George——"

"You're through with him? Knife him?"

"No—curse him. I'll talk with him in the morning. Throw him in the jail for the night.—Wait a minute. Have a drink, George."

They drank together, one after the other from the same bottle.

"I'll go myself," said Sir Harry thickly. "It's a way I have, my man; I do my own killing and skinning, and so I make sure the job's done aright. Then we'll go make the rounds; discipline be damned on a gala night like this, but I'll have me some sober and wide-awake sentinels, lest those Californians creep back on us and butcher us in the night. That done, we'll have my bully boys here with us; a keg to broach and some dice rolling; eh, George?"

They went out together. It grew very still in the house. She slipped the panel back cautiously. For the first time since dawn, trembling so that she could scarcely stand, she stepped out into the hall. Surely they would be gone ten minutes, perhaps half an hour. She dared not count on longer than a few minutes. . . .

Inch by inch she crept along the hall. She came in a few steps to where it opened upon the parlor. The room was deserted. The front door stood open. She looked through and whipped back. An immense fire was burning in the *plaza;* men tossed what they found handiest upon the flames; tables, beds, chairs, benches, anything to burn. Scores of men, jostling one another, went up and down; they leaned against the pillars of the corridors; they squatted here and there. She could not have passed half a dozen steps from the door without brushing against many of them.

A strange weird brightness was in the air. Where was that utter dark on which she had counted? Monterey sent up its flames here, yonder, on all hands. Flames stabbed upward from the old fort; from the houses outside the walls. The night was as bright as

some malign day in hell. Fires crackled, sparks danced upward until the sky seemed filled with stars reeling drunk like the men infesting the entire settlement.

Now she stole along the hall again, but going the other way. Into the bedroom, on through it and into the smaller room beyond. For she knew that there was a rear door, and she hoped, in that hope bred of despair itself, that the way might be open there.

This door she found locked and the key gone. But here the case was no different; through the barred window she saw men everywhere, roistering, drinking, staggering, still bent on pillage; ever dragging fresh spoils to the light, rifling them, cursing and pitching the most part into the flames.

So again was she forced to draw back. She must wait; wait until the fires burned down, until men went to sleep. . . .

Here came footsteps again. She fairly flew back through the little hallway, plunging again into her hiding place, closing the panel in wild haste.

And, impelled by an urgency as great as her own, those rushing footsteps came on. A man dashed into the front room and came running into the hallway. He tripped, treading upon a bottle which rolled noisily against other clinking glass; she heard him curse under his breath.

It was Don Nicolas Vara!

Vara, to whom she would have turned eagerly as to a last hope, had it not been for those words with Harry Hawk which she had overheard; Vara, whom now she dreaded no degree less than these others hemming her in. She heard him when he stopped; she heard him stir again. His cloak brushed against her

panel and she shivered from head to foot. Would he stand there eternally? Would he never go on about his business?

Not his cloak against the panel now! His fingers instead; they groped in the dark; they were trying to get the hidden door open!

She clapped her hand over her mouth; she cowered in her corner, tight-pressed against the furthest wall. For at last there was no doubt left; the panel was opening. Was open! Vara thrust his arm into the closet; his questing hand went swiftly back and forth.

She stood very still, frozen now with horror. Did he know she was here? Was it herself he meant to drag forth? She could not have screamed now had she willed to do so. She could only pray in the depths of her soul that in the darkness and in his obvious haste he might still miss her.

Once he even plucked at her sleeve. But his fingers, urged on by his strange haste, abandoned her to fasten on an old cloak of Sola's. He pulled the thing down, and she heard a little grunt of satisfaction from him. But still he sought on, stooping to the floor now and tumbling over such accumulation of odds and ends as find final harbor in a little-used closet.

Then, just as she began to hope that he was going, he straightened, made a last sweeping search of the narrow space, and thus set his hand upon her head. For an instant he stood as rigid as she. Then his hand fairly leaped to her shoulder, fastening there with a fierce tenacity.

"Who are you?" he whispered savagely. "What do you do here? Out you come! In God's name, it's Virginia Luisa——"

She could scarcely find words to speak; she could scarcely stand.

"Señor Vara! Have mercy! You will not betray me? You will even save me?"

He dragged her with him out into the hall. All the while his fingers bit fiercely into her flesh. He began muttering; she could make little of the words themselves, broken and incoherent fragments. Here was a man in the grip of some powerful emotion, thinking aloud and in flashes rather than to her.

What was he thinking? What could be his thoughts? Memories of how she had mocked him? Of how, after his trickery with his false priest, she was lost to him irrecoverably? Of how he owed her a grudge and no thanks?

She began again, pleading wildly. He remained noncommittally silent. Slowly his hand dropped from her arm; she heard the gush of air drawn deep down into his lungs. At last he spoke, still in a whisper:

"Hide again, señorita, and wait for me. I return in a moment. Be not alarmed that it is Vara who has discovered you. Had it been any of the others, your case had been bad indeed! But Nicolas Vara—you know how you can trust to Nicolas Vara! Be still and wait—five minutes only!"

Clutching the garments he had taken from the closet he was off again, running. She heard him chuckle as he went.

CHAPTER XVII

ALTOGETHER Sir Harry Hawk was gone about his business a full hour. For it turned out to be a very pleasant business indeed, and he lingered over its pleasures. First in order had been his brief interview with Don Nicolas Vara.

"You promised me the person of California's governor," he said pleasantly. "You lied to me. To-night you lie in the jail here to think the matter over. In the morning it may be that I will discuss it with you. Or," he added with his humorous quirk. "I may hang you dangling to the flagpole in the *plaza,* replacing the colors you served so faithfully."

He saw his men hustle the cursing Vara into the jail, then with his own hand turned the great key, and went on, smiling.

His course carried him among his merry gentlemen, very merry indeed to-night with unstinted wine and feasting. They had found half a dozen cattle left behind and had slaughtered them to the last one. On their generous fires great hunks of bloody meat roasted. He stopped to drink and gorge with them. He clapped many upon the shoulders, and many were those invited to visit him later, in the governor's apartments, now Sir Harry Hawk's, for the best of brandies and perchance a game at dice.

But while he loitered others made haste, Vara chief among them. In the jail, where he had counted on finding the two Indian captives, he had found but one man, Molina, burning with thirst.

"It is you, Molina? Still here?"

"*Si*, señor," said Molina thickly. "The pirates, they are gone?"

"But the two Indians? Where are they?" queried Vara.

"Gone, señor. Crawled out the hole——"

"The hole? What hole, man?" Vara shook him savagely.

"There in the wall. Where Captain Cavalier made it——"

Vara hastened to see.

"And Cavalier?" he demanded. "What of him?"

"Gone, too, señor. But five minutes ago—— Oh, an hour ago. I don't know. But I grow hungry; and I thirst. The pirates——"

Vara heard no more. But there was one who listened even more intently, missing nothing. This was Captain Cavalier himself, who had drawn himself again through the hole to the outside of the wall as he heard men fumbling at the door, when they came to lock Vara in here. With escape shut off at dawn, he had lain here awaiting in all readiness what might be the next turn of the wheel. When that wheel took a fortunate turn for him, as he was ever hopeful it would, and the two Indians were immured as his cell mates, he decided that for him there could be no safer place in Monterey than its jail. He even counted on what had happened; that the Indians would be neglected while their captives roistered; that he would have a day of that very neglect he so coveted.

But there had not been a moment all day long when he was not prepared for instant action. So now, when he heard the clamor at the door, he emulated the In-

dians who had already crawled through at the first dark. And now, crouching outside in the shadow of the wall, looking this way and that for the readiest avenue of escape, he listened with all his ears.

Thus he learned, first of all, that Harry Hawk and Nicolas Vara had quarrelled, with the result that Vara was thrown into jail. Next, listening on as though he had been a professional eavesdropper all his life, he had an inkling of another matter. Where he could have looked to Vara to thank his stars for a lucky hole in the wall and make instant use of it, he found instead a Vara taking his time and grown thoughtful; a Vara cooking up some fresh scheme of his own. Something that had to do with the poor devil Molina. For he went back to him and set him questions and muttered aloud to himself after Molina sank back and appeared to go to sleep.

". . . a suit of Sola's will do the trick. . . ."

Such was one of the fragments for Captain Cavalier to make the most of that he could. And then, here at last came Vara, wriggling through the little tunnel, scrambling to his feet and making off in the strangest of all directions. For instead of running away from the *presidio,* he made straight through the gate again and into the *plaza.*

"A suit of Sola's?"

Captain Cavalier straightened up and stared after the hurrying Vara.

"He's trading somehow on that poor devil's odd resemblance to Sola! It is likely that Harry Hawk has seen the governor from a distance; that Vara thinks to palm off this substitute—To gain some reward; to play some satanic trick of his own?"

He stooped to the hole he had made.

"Ho, there, Molina!" he whispered as loud as he dared.

Molina answered drowsily.

"Better come out, man, while you can. I'll give you a hand. Hurry."

"No," muttered Molina. "I stay here—loyal to Monterey—*Viva Fernando*——"

Captain Cavalier, hoping to save him against himself, cajoled, argued, and threatened. All to no avail; Molina grunted and went to sleep.

Having done what he could, Captain Cavalier shrugged all responsibility off his shoulders and turned his mind exclusively to his own affair. Were it not for Vara coming athwart his path, he had gladly waited another hour before saying his farewells to Monterey. Men still went up and down everywhere; sentinels walked back and forth, evidently on guard against a possible dashing return of the garrison; and tall columns of fire, shot through with plumes and curls and bannerets of black smoke, stood up in a dozen places, consuming the interiors of houses, bursting through roofs and windows, making a great deal of undesired light.

Fortunately for whatever it was that Vara planned, it had not been generally known that he had been placed under arrest. Therefore he went his way unchallenged, since that way led into the *presidio* and not toward flight; at the moment Harry Hawk and the big Kanaka were at the far end of the *presidio* and outside the walls, making their rounds. He went at a break-neck run to Sola's rooms, made his swift seizure of clothes and boots, had his word with her whom he had

discovered in hiding, and, while Captain Cavalier still reconnoitred from a place in the shadows not a score of paces from the mouth of his tunnel, here returned Vara with his bundle. He went down on hands and knees, thrust the garments before him, and was again inside the jail.

Captain Cavalier had never been Captain Cavalier had he not delayed a last moment, stooping and listening. He heard Vara cursing Molina into sluggish activity; understood that he was getting the man dressed in the new cloak and boots.

The thing was done with amazing swiftness; like a rabbit from its burrow Vara popped out again, giving Captain Cavalier barely time to withdraw and conceal himself. Off again at a run went Don Nicolas. . . .

"It's just the man's idea of a joke. But whether the joke is to be on Harry Hawk or on poor old Molina, it would take the devil to tell."

Again he sought to dismiss the matter from his mind, naming himself a meddlesome fool for harboring thoughts having to do with Vara when he were best trimming his own sails. Yet again he was forced to inactivity. A squad of men was approaching; six or eight of them, with two whom he recognised from a distance leading the way. These two were Harry Hawk himself and the Kanaka. Both walked lurchingly; both, plainly enough, were drunk. Yet, drunk or sober, there was always a glimmer of his native craft in Harry Hawk, and none knew it better than Captain Cavalier. He watched them narrowly, hoping that they would pass without coming too dangerously close.

Hawk was stationing his sentinels, giving them their bounds and swearing to cut the ears off any man who

grew lax at his duty. Being rather drunker than he had been for a very long time, he grew rather more cautious. Thus he placed double the outposts any other man would have thought of doing; and thus he doubled Captain Cavalier's hazards.

Presently, the Kanaka having gone with two of the men toward the *castillo,* Hawk turned in at the gate. Captain Cavalier heard him cry out in wonderment. He had met Don Nicolas Vara, whom, but a short while ago, his own hands had locked in Monterey's sturdy jail! There was that old hint of superstitious fear in Hawk's cry.

What the two had to say to each other was lost to him. But they must have come back to the jail door almost at a run. For before Cavalier had stirred again, he heard them rattling away at the padlock, their voices raised in a meaningless clamor.

The door was open at last; they were inside; flint and steel or a brand brought from the great fire created a light for them.

"You see, man," Vara cried arrogantly, "there is no jail in California to hold me. You see further that Nicolas Vara is the one to keep his promise. I said that I would give you Pablo Sola; look at him, worn out, exhausted and drunk in despair—but my prisoner——"

Again that superstitious cry from Harry Hawk.

Vara's arrogance mounted to fresh heights. His was the high hand now, his the haughty bravado. In his voice was the note of rare, diabolical mockery. He cried out ringingly:

"You shall see, señor, how Nicolas Vara keeps his pledged word. I promised you Sola? Here he is; I

give him to you. When, setting myself free, I might have fled, I return to redeem my word."

"You will tell me," muttered Hawk, evidently utterly bewildered, "how you have accomplished this thing? Or am I drunk and imagining the impossible?"

Vara's short laugh prefixed Vara's saying sharply:

"Think well, now, Harry Hawk! What else did I guarantee you?"

How Hawk must have been staring all the while!

"Monterey to loot?" went on Vara. "Well, you have it. Spoils of a sort? You have them. And, I seem to remember, that you craved something else, something rarer and finer and softer; big eyes to melt into your own; the ministering of some señorita——"

"Man, man!" exclaimed Hawk. "What now?"

And now Captain Cavalier, breathless to catch every word, went as cold as ice.

"What now?" laughed Vara. "You shall hear; you shall see. And then you shall aid rather than impede my departure? What say you when I put into your hands the very daintiest, loveliest maid in all California?"

"You don't mean *her?*" gasped Hawk. "Not Cavalier's fancy?"

"What if I make you the pretty gift of her this minute?"

"Are you a magician then? Do that and you go free; you have what you wish of me——"

"Come then! I have her at hand. Shut in a closet for you, no further away than Sola's rooms——"

"What?" screamed Harry Hawk. "You have her? She is here? Now, tell me——"

Harry Hawk, his befuddled brain striving mightily

to come at an understanding of events which could but bewilder him further, might stop to ask further questions and to be assured that here was not some tangle of lies and trickery. But Captain Cavalier had heard enough. He broke into a run, dashed in at the gate, hurtled into a man and left him cursing behind. Let all the pirates that ever sailed the blue Pacific stand in his way, he meant to go through them. As straight as a flying dart he raced toward the governor's rooms.

CHAPTER XVIII

FORTUNATELY for Captain Cavalier, the carousal in the *plaza* was now at its maddest. Everywhere were men shouting, singing, clamoring in voices deep and shrill; some gaming upon blankets spread in the firelight; some indulging in good-humored rough bantering, some quarrelling; here came a dozen making a great to-do in a sort of triumphant entry as they rolled a full hogshead along before them, tumbling over it as it rolled; yonder, while one fellow beat manfully at a captured drum and another set his drooling lips to an ancient trumpet, half a dozen staggering wretches gave their gross version of some South Sea island dance while their little coterie of onlookers shouted and clapped in noisy applause. Amid such a devil's gathering, all drunk or half drunk, Captain Cavalier rushing along drew but scant attention to himself, saving alone and briefly from those into whom he careered full tilt. Even those few, seeing him pass like a ricocheting ball, merely rocked on their heels and followed him with their curses. So, without once drawing the sword on whose hilt his hand was set in readiness, he came with an unimpeded rush to the governor's rooms.

He flung the door open. Though no candle had been lighted the fireglow from the *plaza* flickered through the place, revealing with sufficient clearness the objects in the room. A sweeping glance showed him the table strewn with bottles; the chairs pushed

back against the walls; a guitar hanging from a peg. Otherwise emptiness. He entered swiftly, sword in hand now, eager-eyed for the finding of Virginia Luisa, alert for anything. Rushing into an empty house, one never knew what he might stumble on!

He closed the door, hesitated an instant as he thought whether to shoot the bolt toward which his hand had gone automatically; made his swift decision and went on, leaving it unfastened. Almost at his heels he could look for Hawk and Vara. He counted on them coming alone. Hawk would want to see his pretty prize for himself; he would want no rabble at his heels. Yes, determined Captain Cavalier grimly; better let the two come on alone rather than set them the task of battering down the door and attracting a mob thereby. Further, could he be swift enough, he might have Virginia Luisa by the hand and be out again through that same door before they came.

"Virginia!" he called softly. "Virginia Luisa!'

He ran through the hall, speeding to the adjoining room. As he hastened he heard a little gasp at his very side. He came to an abrupt dead halt, staring into the gloom which had resulted from closing the door. The sound had seemed to come from the wall itself! Though he swept his arm out and brushed the wall, there appeared to be no one near. He called again.

"Virginia! Are you here? It's Cavalier. Quick, if you would live the night through."

The panel went back with a rush. Her hand was on his arm.

"I'm here. In the closet.—*You!*"

He caught her hand tight in his.

"Whatever happens, keep up your courage now.

We've got to go back through those devils outside. Unless there's another door?"

"It's locked. I tried it. The windows are barred——"

"This way, then. Remember, our two lives are not worth a *centavo* if we blunder in one step. Be quick to do whatever I tell you——"

"Señor Vara will help——"

"Vara ran to Harry Hawk to tell him he had you here! That is how I learned. Do you understand? Anything but trust in Vara. They will be here in a minute. Now, if we can win through before——"

"Oh!" she gasped. "They are coming!"

"Aye," he groaned. "They are here. Back into the closet," he commanded in a low whisper.

He even thrust her back. Never had his brain worked so swiftly. Thoughts darted through his mind, coming and going like hastening sparks through swirling smoke. Never in his life had he told himself more earnestly: "There is ever a way if a man can but see it!"

True to expectation and hope alike, Hawk came attended only by Nicolas Vara. The odds against him were but two to one—as long as what might be done here escaped the attention of the howling mob outside.

"I'll shut the door and bolt it," Harry Hawk was saying in the very highest pitch of excitement. "You stand guard while I make out if you have told me truly. Man, man, if you have put that delicious morsel into the hands of Harry Hawk this night, you are free on the instant to whatever thing, great or small, you ask of me. Now, which way? Where's the cursed closet?"

"In the hall there," said Vara coolly. "Feel your

way. There's a wooden panel on the left. She's behind that."

Captain Cavalier listened; he felt a shudder shake Virginia Luisa; he gave her a warm pressure of the hand; and all the while his brain raced. He would handle these two men; he would do it somehow in sufficient silence; there would be only sword and dagger play, with never a pistol shot. Then for the dash into the *plaza*. The devil of it was that a girl must attract attention. . . .

"One thing at the time," he decided as he heard Harry Hawk coming. "I've the advantage in giving him the surprise of his life. Then to strike swift and sure——"

Virginia Luisa was back in the closet. With sudden determination bred of a flash of inspiration he stepped in after her and drew the panel half shut. Alert to every possible suggestion, as one needs must be if he hoped to live through such experiences as thickened the reckless path of Captain Cavalier, he even took stock of that which brushed against him in this narrow space. Clothes hanging from hooks—a pair of old boots.

"Put on these clothes," he whispered, his lips at her ear. "Anything to hide that you are a girl——"

"It's most devilish dark," growled Harry Hawk, still shuffling closer. "Light a candle, Vara."

But, without waiting for Vara to strike flint and steel, his impatience urged him on. His hand brushed against the panel, discoverd the opening where Cavalier had left it ajar, and was thrust in.

"Aha, my little beauty!" he cried. "My little one comes back to me, does she? Pretending to return

for that good-for-nothing Cavalier she throws herself into the arms of Harry Hawk——"

His questing fingers brushed her arm. A stifled scream broke from her. Captain Cavailer thrust her back still further into the corner and slipped in front of her. Hawk's fingers were still seeking; Hawk had laughed delightedly at her scream, the first sound to tell him beyond all doubting that Vara had not lied to him.

"Now, my beauty," he said coaxingly. "Come out where we can see you better. Where we can have a nice talk together, just you and I. We are going to send Vara on his business in a minute."

Captain Cavalier manœuvred so that it was his own cloak on which Hawk's fingers closed. The fingers tugged; Cavalier held back just enough to incite Harry Hawk to further eagerness. Virginia Luisa moaned and again Hawk laughed drunkenly. He pulled harder at the cloak, with both hands now. And Captain Cavalier, meaning to allow no such time as would permit Vara to strike a light and find a candle, appeared to be drawn forth against his will.

"I've got her, Vara!" cried Hawk. "By God——"

He had Captain Cavalier out in the hall now, and was drawing him toward the parlor.

"And I've got you, Harry Hawk!" whispered Captain Cavalier.

Both hands shot out unerringly and closed swift and tight and mercilessly hard about Harry Hawk's throat, choking off words and breath together. They shut tighter and tighter and still tighter. Had there been light to see, it would have been a horrible sight as Harry Hawk's vicious little eyes stood out, as his face went a deep congested purple, as his tongue began

thrusting forth until it hung like a dog's from his wide-open mouth.

To choke the life out of the little reptile was Captain Cavalier's savage thought and sole desire. If he could account for one of the two against him before Vara guessed or got his candle burning, he would have simplified matters most satisfactorily. He exerted a still greater pressure, drawing upon the last reserves of his strength. Hawk's hands fluttered upward, trying to break that steely grip which was putting the chill fear of death into his soul. When the fluttering hands fell away and went plucking nervously for a dagger, Captain Cavalier withdrew his own right hand and smote with it. Such a blow it was that, had it landed square it must have crushed Harry Hawk's skull like an eggshell. Even delivered haphazardly in the dark it flung the little man back against the wall, where he wilted down to sag, sprawl and lie, half dead and less than half conscious of what went on about him.

Vara had heard, and had laughed, misinterpreting the scuffle, going on about his candle lighting and saying with a chuckle:

"She'll scratch your face for you before ever you tame her, man."

But he started at the sound of that blow and the crash of the falling body, and whirled about, demanding sharply, suddenly suspicious:

"What is it, man? What is happening?"

He had managed to light his candle and set it on the table. He came leaping forward, his sword flashing out.

"Cavalier!" he gasped, falling back to stare. "How in hell's name——"

For now, the second time, he seemed to see Hawk metamorphosed into Cavalier!

For answer Captain Cavalier fell upon him with such a fury of onslaught that it must have borne Vara off his feet and toppled him head first into eternity were it not for the accident of the table barring the way. Vara's period of spellbound consternation was of but the briefest; he threw himself on guard, and Captain Cavalier saw in a flash that he had to do with one not unskilled at sword play.

Skilled or unskilled, the man must be disposed of in a matter of seconds! Else there was no hope. Prolonged fighting here would run a grave danger of drawing attention. Further, Hawk was out of it but temporarily. This flashed with the clear emphasis of a streak of lightning on Cavalier as he leaped forward; at the chance of being spitted on Vara's sword he must scorn all finesse of feint and parry, and drive straight ahead to a speedy end. Now was no time to go around obstacles. To come to safety, he must go straight on over them!

Already Vara, seeing that he had to do with but one man, and that man Captain Cavalier, was lifting his voice, shouting mightily.

"Ho! Outside there. To the rescue. It's Cavalier——"

With one bound Captain Cavalier leaped to the table top. With another he was over it, striking as he came to grips with Vara. He must have been sheathed in the finest of steel armor to have attacked in such headlong recklessness and received no wound. So urgent was his haste that he welcomed Vara's sword thrust in order to deliver his own. Thus Vara's

point, lunging at his heart, cut savagely into the left shoulder he left unguarded. And at the same instant his own blade, driven savagely, pierced Vara's right shoulder and stood out six inches at his back.

Vara, with a scream of pain, dropped his sword. He fell back a pace, bringing up against the wall, swaying yet keeping his feet. And again, though he had to fight for the strength to shout, he began calling:

"Help——"

"Oho, ho, ho!" shouted Captain Cavalier, swaying a little where he stood, his own face white and drawn. But his voice rose high above Vara's, drowning it. "Ha, ha, ha!" he roared.

For he had heard a hand at the door. Some one called: "What's going on in there?"

Captain Cavalier stepped swiftly close to Vara; his sword point pricked the flesh of Vara's throat. His eyes glared a deadly warning. And then suddenly, as the one outside stood uncertain, Captain Cavalier lifted his voice again and began to sing:

> "We've looted many the Port in France,
> We've gutted full many the Town in Spain;
> We've had our fling at the Devil's Dance,
> And sailed toward Hell on the Spanish Main."

The one at the door appeared uncertain.

"Did somebody call for help?" he demanded.

"Help?" muttered Captain Cavailer, deepening his voice against recognition, his sword point pressed until it needed but the slightest touch to drive it in. "What help? With a bottle of brandy? Come now, my bully boys; another stave."

And he began singing again. Yet all the while he

watched. Harry Hawk was on his hands and knees. And just behind Hawk stood a figure which at first made him start, a figure to cause him a shock of surprise, and in that initial surprise caused him a sinking of the heart. Then he saw that under the long cloak and standing in the tall boots it was Virginia Luisa! She had even drawn on an old hat. . . .

She had done her part, swiftly and well. If he could do his now, they still stood their chance to go clear. He had Vara silenced; there was Hawk to handle, and Hawk was out of his reach unless he withdrew his sword point. Hawk was gasping irregularly, still fighting for a normal flow of breath into his tortured lungs. In another second he would be on his feet; would be charging with sword or pistol—would be shouting. And a pistol shot now would surely call back that lingering fellow at the door.

He must finish Vara in cold blood. Yet Vara stood unarmed and wounded; it was plain butchery, and but a sickening business for a man with sporting blood in his veins.

Captain Cavalier whipped out his pistol in his left hand. Vara shouted, but with his voice Cavalier's rose again, louder, clearer:

"What-ho, my bully boys, broach the rum——" and as he shouted the words he struck with the pistol barrel. Vara sought to dodge, but was already weak and faint. The double barrels struck him on the crown of the head and he dropped in his tracks. On the instant Captain Cavalier spun about and leaped at Hawk. And Harry Hawk, with a sword point now at his own throat, sank back and lay on the floor.

He had thought that fellow at the door had gone

about his business. But again he was pounding at the door and muttering and finally calling out:

"Are you in there, Cap'n? What's afoot? Anything amiss?"

"It's that fool Nosegay," Captain Cavalier hissed into Hawk's ear. "Tell him to go to the devil—or I'll send your reeking soul there ahead of him!"

Hawk glared and then flinched, his flesh twitching as the sword point drove terror into him.

"Quick!" whispered Cavalier.

"Go on away, Nosegay," called Hawk sullenly.

"You're busy here and won't be disturbed," whispered Cavalier.

"I'm busy. Go, man—— *Hurry and go!*" he shrilled as Cavalier grew impatient.

Nosegay grumbled something unintelligible and they heard him move away. How far? One step only or to a safe distance? Captain Cavalier was little pleased at the thought that Nosegay had come into the matter at all. The slightest bit of suspicion outside was enough to undo their last, wan hope.

He prodded Harry Hawk to his feet, menaced him with death if he dared utter a syllable or stir a hand, and marched him across the room to a chair close to Vara's prone body.

"If either of you move, that one is a dead man, Hawk," he said with a very convincing sternness. "Nosegay's stupid skull has opened to a gleam that something's wrong here. You shall reassure him."

"I'll see you in hell first!"

"Oh, no; you'll do nothing of the kind." Cavalier leaned against the table. His wound pained him savagely, and he could feel the hot blood running down

his shoulder. Well, if he but kept his strength a little while longer, the thing was done. Let Nosegay truly depart or at least lose all suspicion, and the trick was as good as turned.

He caught up a bottle and drank. The strong brandy warmed him and goaded his wounded body into a fresh vigor. He beckoned to Virginia Luisa, who, white and trembling, came awkwardly forward in Sola's great boots.

"The guitar!" he whispered. "Strum on it for us. Hawk and I are going to sing a little song for Nosegay!"

"Curse you——"

"Sh! No word above a whisper unless it be in song!" He spoke dispassionately now, but there was a deal of earnest persuasion in a sword at a man's throat! And he nodded commandingly to Virginia Luisa.

She caught wildly at the guitar. Her hands were shaking so that she could scarcely hold it. Yet she began plucking excitedly at the strings, and never had such skilful hands made such clashing discords. But to their discords Captain Cavalier began singing, again muffling his voice somewhat so that the stupid Nosegay might not by any remote chance recognize it. And then, almost immediately, so close did the sword point come to letting the life out of him, Harry Hawk in a strange and uncertain voice joined in.

"Louder!" urged Cavalier between verses.

Louder sang Harry Hawk. Outside Nosegay, mystified, scratched his head. Surely that was Harry Hawk singing, for it was Harry Hawk's voice. But there was some strange new quality in it, to perplex a brighter man than Nosegay.

"Drink must have done it," was Nosegay's final decision. "He is pretty drunk to-day."

And at last off he went to emulate his captain. They were broaching the great new hogshead there by the bonfire.

Vara stirred, groaned, and presently sat up, blinking and staring and finally cursing.

"Play louder, faster, Virginia, while I talk to these two gentlemen," said Cavalier quickly.

"Oh, *Virgen santisima!*" she gasped. And then, "Yes, yes!"

Cavalier removed first Vara's weapons, tossing dagger, pistol, and sword into the hallway. The same office he performed for Harry Hawk.

"Now shall I kill you, Harry Hawk?" he said softly. "Or have you a fool's fond desire to see another sun come up?"

"I've told you—I'll see you in hell before——"

"Before the next sixty seconds have passed," said Cavalier, grim and deadly, "you'll see many an old friend in hell unless you use your wits to some purpose. If I am not to go free from this trap, and the lady with me, do you think you have any chance to live long enough to see your dogs pull me down? Ah, no, Harry, my boy; if I die, you die first. You've my solemn word for that."

Hawk was licking his lips audibly. His eyes roved everywhere; his cunning brain would by now be hard at work. Vara's eyes, which had been dull and heavy, began to clear.

"What do you want of me, man?" snarled Hawk.

"I've told you. Only to go free, the lady with me!"

Hawk simulated mockery.

"Only that? With perhaps the sun, moon, and stars to carry off in your pocket! Don't you know that there are two hundred men you'll have to go through? And that to the last man they'd ask no better than to cut you down and—relieve you of the lady?"

"Yet free we go. Aye, you rat, free we'd go were there ten times your drunken two hundred yelping after us! If you do your part, little man. And if you fail us in one jot, why, then, you have my word for it, you're a dead man before I start fighting!"

"You're a fool——"

"Which disposes of me. Now, what of you? Fool or wise man?"

With the words came a sudden twitch of the wrist holding the sword. The barest slight twitch, yet the keen point made its tiny scratch and Harry Hawk felt the first slow, hot drops of blood.

"Hold your hand, Cavalier!" he stammered. "Curse you, you've got the top hand and much good may it do you. I elect to save me my own life. Now, what orders?" he jeered.

"Good. You were ever a logical little beast, Harry Hawk; that is how your whilom captain can put his trust in you at a pinch like this one."

"Hold your hand, man," pleaded Hawk nervously. Great drops of sweat gathered on his forehead. "What do you ask of me?"

"You mark the cloak I wear? Good. In a moment I am going to put my sword away. Thereafter I'll have a pistol in each hand, each pistol at the full cock. My arms shall be crossed, under this same cloak, mind you, and not to attract attention, yet not to be forgot.

When I say the word, you will step close to me, on my right hand, and you'll feel the comfortable nose of one of them peering with some degree of curiosity at your very middle. Then, on a word, your friend Vara will heave himself up and step similarly to my left side. We'll be like three good friends arm-in-arm, thus. Is it understood?"

"I cannot stand," groaned Vara. "It would be my death to seek to walk."

"Then you walk to your death," said Cavalier sternly. "I'll take no chances on leaving either of you behind. We'll fling the door wide open; we'll go out of it like three jolly devils roistering. Aye, though you stagger and half faint at every step, Vara. They'll but hold us drunk, like the rest. So we walk across the *plaza* and out at the gate——"

"No, muttered Vara. "You'd use us to escape; then what of us? Hawk, he'd drop us dead and be off!"

"So I've thought," said Harry Hawk morosely.

"But I'll do nothing of the sort, since I'm forced to barter with you," Cavalier assured them. "Once clear of the *presidio,* I'll let the two of you go."

"He lies," said Vara. He clasped his wounded shoulder and fell to groaning. Cavalier, while he went on speaking to Hawk, watched Vara narrowly.

"I talk to you, Harry Hawk. You know best whether I lie or not. Now, I pledge you my word to kill you both if you refuse to accommodate me. I pledge you that same word you shall go scot free if you elect to aid me. Now decide. And decide while a man could count ten. For, if you choose death and stubbornness for your portions, I would know without delay and take my chances without you."

There was the slightest possible hesitation. Then Hawk sighed and thereafter spoke hurriedly.

"Have it your way, Cavalier. I take you at your word. You have promised to set me free when I have done my part?"

"The two of you; you and Vara."

"Curse Vara for a fool and a traitor."

Harry Hawk's eyes roved evilly; it was obvious that he held Vara responsible in his own mind for their present predicament.

Captain Cavalier laughed. Virginia Luisa looked at him marvelling. She saw that his hand was red with blood where he leaned on the table; blood that had trickled down his arm.

"Come; let us get it over with," muttered Harry Hawk, and seemed of a sudden all eagerness.

"I read your brain, you scurvy rat," Cavalier snapped back at him. "You think to set up such a hue and cry, with your two hundred dogs baying at our backs, as to run us to earth again? Well, we take our chance on that, too, since it is the best we can ask and be sure of getting. Come then; are you ready? Now, Vara."

But Vara only groaned and seemed to be slipping back as though his little strength had flickered out of him. Cavalier stooped over him and plucked him rudely to his feet.

"Any little agony you may suffer to-night is of your own making, my shifty scoundrel," he said angrily. "and not greatly beyond your deserts. Now, steady. Come, Hawk. You will fall in behind us, Virginia? Having first opened the door for us and let us pass. Gentlemen—forward! And not like sneak thieves,

hiding, but like four very gay and very bold gentlemen of adventure—swaying a little as we go, perchance, yet lifting our voices in song. Virginia, the guitar!"

With a sudden fierce gesture he thrust both right and left with the two pistols hidden under his cloak, and hissed rather than whispered the one word: *"Sing!"*

There was grim insistence in the harsh command; there was a vast eloquent and emphatic persuasion in the steady pressure under the cloak. Harry Hawk, with the cold sweat on his brow, lifted his clear voice suddenly and sang. Cavalier joined lustily in. Even Vara, lurching along at his side, was forced to certain ill-humored grunting sounds which did well enough as a sort of muttering accompaniment to the two stronger, clearer voices. All this while Virginia Luisa had held the old guitar in her hands; now she, close behind them, began plucking away like mad at the strings.

Out into the red light of the fire stepped the four from the governor's rooms. With men all about them, they passed straight on to the gate. Some looked after them curiously.

"Louder!" whispered Captain Cavalier between verses.

> "We've looted many the Port in France,
> We've gutted full many the Town in Spain;
> We've had our fling at the Devil's Dance,
> And sailed toward Hell on the Spanish Main."

And now, so clearly and cheerily did Captain Cavalier's voice ring out, and so vehemently did Harry Hawk find himself compelled to lift his own bugle

notes, and so mightily did Virginia Luisa's shaking hands tear chords and discords from the guitar, that the contagion of their singing fell upon others. Men all about them began to lift their own voices to the beat of the familiar air and joined tempestuously in the refrain.

And so, amid a roar of voices, they came to the gate. As they passed on, their singing done with, Cavalier remembered Harry Hawk's sentinels, and spoke of them.

"I saw you post your men a little while ago, Harry Hawk. We'll not tarry for any of them and they will have little thought to stop us if we go straight on our way. That way leads through the houses yonder and to the edge of the wood. And if any grow curious concerning us, it must be you who calls out to them who you are and that you are but going to post a fresh guard."

So, still four abreast and as silent as death again, they hurried on. Virginia Luisa felt the mist in the air and lifted her face to it; she drank deep of freedom, filling her lungs. She walked with the others like one in a dream. Was it true, then, that again she was to go free and unharmed? Even of Harry Hawk, though her arm brushed his, she was no longer afraid! She began to place in Captain Cavalier a trust like that which a small child places in mother and father. She had feared once when she saw the blood dribble down to his hand that he was badly hurt. His bearing since then had reassured her. Seeing how he bore himself, hearing how he sang, she judged it a mere scratch.

Even now, Captain Cavalier, seeming vastly pleased, began to chuckle, and she thanked God he had been spared any serious hurt.

"You have been the best and most accommodating of friends, Harry Hawk and Nicolas Vara," he proclaimed. "A few minutes more of your time now and I'll not trouble you further. A bit to the right, an it please you both. There is a gully yonder; we go down into it just beyond those huts and up the other side. Then into that black blot of trees. After that, we'll stroll along a mile together; I know you will want to see us that far on our journey. Unless you grow impatient to race back and get your pack of hounds on the scent? Tut, tut; one should not hurry over the pleasant places in life. Further, in the dark and in the wilderness yonder you'd but waste your time."

With none to answer, he fell silent. And in black silence they splashed along, through mud and drizzle. Beyond the gully they came among the first trees. They heard Captain Cavalier's deep sigh. With all his singing and chuckling, Virginia Luisa began to think again of his wound and fear for him. On they went, keeping to the clearer open spaces for the sake of making speed and to allow them to continue in the original formation of four abreast. Only when they had gone well upward of a mile did Cavalier call a halt.

"Our thanks to you, most sweet gentlemen," he mocked them. "We shall not detain you longer. Now you have my permission to go; to run as fast as you please, to shout out for help as loud as you please, to chase back questing in all hot haste. Lady, your hand? We step along alone now, and, I think, in some haste of our own."

He caught her hand and they sped away, leaving Hawk and Vara standing side by side. And now, with Cavalier leading the way, they pressed on into the deepest, darkest of the wood.

How tightly she clung to his hand now. It was so far to her own people at the King's *rancho;* it was but so short a distance from the *presidio* reeking with foul men.

"Run! Oh, run! They will be after us again."

"Aye, we'll run fast enough," he retorted. But while she was all quivering alarm, here he was the true Captain Cavalier himself, to all appearances cool and serene, radiating the utmost unconcern.

"Perhaps," he added, "you think me crack-brained to have let them go so soon? Well, perhaps; it has ever been said so of me. But, to ease your mind a trifle, you are free to my explanation: I did not care to have them with us overlong, as I would rather they did not know in which direction we travel——"

"But there can be but the one direction! We have no friends nearer than the Rancho del Rey, and it is there we must hurry. All night——"

She was dragging him along frantically. She could hear voices at a distance; Harry Hawk's bugle voice yelling as he ran toward the *presidio.* But Captain Cavalier hastened to speak what small comfort he could.

"Hawk but wastes his breath; they'll hear never a word, such a frolic do they make of the night, until he's fairly under the walls. And now for the second part of my explanation: it is toward Rancho del Rey that you would run; and it is toward Rancho del Rey that they'll look for us. Meanwhile, you and I take here a more southerly direction. I know where, but a bare league distance, there is as pretty a thick park-like grove in as wild a country as two fugitives ever sought. Have I not hidden out there myself?

And, provident being that I am, have I not even left the place provisioned? 'Tis there we haste, most sweet lady; and there, almost under their noses, and hence where they'll look least to find us, we rest us through the night and the coming day. For I am of the mind that we will both find ourselves none the worse for a bit of sleep and food. And now—will you trust yourself to Captain Cavalier?"

"Oh, how gladly!" she cried softly.

They went on, making all possible haste. Virginia Luisa darted ahead, dragging at his hand. And now it dawned upon her that his haste was less than her own. Then she remembered how hard he had fought; he was like a man wearied out. He seemed to stagger along after her. And he was so strangely silent.

"What is it?" she cried in sudden alarm. "You are not—you are not badly hurt?"

"The third and last bit of my explanation, most sweet lady," he muttered. "I did not want them to know. Here; help me wind my cloak tight about my side. They'd track us in the dawn by the blood else——"

"Oh, dear God," she wailed. "This is the end!"

"Come," he said harshly. "The end? By high heaven and deep hell, lady, it's but the beginning!"

CHAPTER XIX

"READY?" said Captain Cavalier. "First throw off those heavy boots you borrowed from Sola; let the rogues find them here where they will tell nothing of the way we'll turn now——"

"I kicked them off back yonder, near the *presidio*."

"Good. Now your hand again, most sweet lady. In this pitch dark we lose each other else."

He led the way, turning deeper into the wood. She grew terribly afraid again as she made out that, describing a wide arc, he was turning back in the general direction of Monterey. She had told him that she trusted him fully, that she meant to follow where he led, yet now she hesitated so that she held him back. Therefore he paused a moment.

"You hold it folly to head back toward danger?" he said quickly. "Well, in this type of folly there lies at times the greatest wisdom. I tell you they'll look for us to run toward the Rancho del Rey. Now that we have some few minutes' respite, let us not waste them, my Virginia. There'll be a moment or two lost by them, I take it, while Vara and Hawk have a word to speak to each other, some other few moments while little Harry races back to the *presidio* and stirs his hornets up. After that they'll buzz forth lively enough. Further, not running us to earth to-night, little venomous Harry will set a cordon of men athwart the likely trails running inland, and watch for us from every

vantage point, come day. So, *señorita mia,* we go where they'll not seek us. Ready?"

"Yes," she managed to answer. "I'll not hold back again."

"Come, then." He stumbled over a rock and she heard him mutter under his breath. "Darkness a degree less absolute would satisfy me," he grunted as they went on. "I'll have a pretty time of it ever finding my hiding place in this roundabout fashion. Hear that?"

Her fingers clutched his, icy and shivering. Here is what their ears had told them: the devil's medley of raucous voices at the *presidio* had all this while reached them faintly, and now suddenly fell away, sunk in a deep, abrupt silence. That could mean only that Harry Hawk had arrived among them to shout such news as briefly stupefied them. Then arose a wild clamorous shouting, sinister like the yelping of wolves.

"So, the pack opens," said Captain Cavalier. "They'll hunt us with a will, Virginia. For the sake of your dear self and for the joy of laying me by the heels, there's many among them that will run like a dog on a hot scent. But never fear; such tire soon and will yearn for their fires and their liquor. But wisdom urges us to speed on."

It was like a nightmare. Running in utter dark, she knew not whither, pursued by creatures which she could scarce think of as men. Now the voices fell away, now rose again in shrieking violence; voices thick and dull, voices shrill and vibrant, all bestial, drunken, horrible. At times these sounds seemed far off, and she breathed again; at times, with a little puff

of wind bearing them to her, they seemed fearfully close. Tighter and tighter her fingers clasped Captain Cavalier's.

He led her into a thicket of *manzanita* and *toyon;* through it into a little clear space under trees from whose thick branches she could feel wet drops falling upon her face. Here he stopped and threw himself down, commanding her to follow his example, to rest and listen.

"Not so near them!" she exclaimed. "Oh, señor——"

Then she broke off and dropped down to her knees at his side, murmuring:

"It is your wound! You can go no further! Oh, señor, and it is because of me——"

Though he could scarcely see her form, he knew that she had put her face into her hands and must surely be weeping. He reached out a hand and patted her shoulder gently.

"Nonsense," he said lightly. "I've a wound like a cut finger. We'll be up and away in a minute. Meanwhile I burn with—you'd never guess what!"

"You have taken cold in your cut!" she whispered fearfully. "It is inflamed; fever has begun——"

"I burn—with curiosity!" he chuckled. "I heard that villain Hawk say some few strange words back there in the house. That you had returned to the *presidio* because of—because of what, señorita?"

"They told me that His Excellency had shut you up in jail. I knew that if you fell into the hands of those pirates——"

"And so, for the sake of saving the worthless skin

of this arrant Captain Cavalier, you rode back alone to Monterey?" He heaved himself up from the ground and caught her hand again. "Come, my Virginia; you and I go free this night! 'Tis written in the stars."

She sighed. In this bleak black world engulfing them there were no stars. Only yonder, in the murk, little dancing sparks from the big fires, sweeping aloft, swirling, blinking out in the black sky.

"We've but to come to my hiding place," he reassured her. "It is where I lay from the time when I left you at Don Julian's *rancho*. I have shelter there and food. And it cannot be so much as a league from here."

"And from the *presidio*, how far, señor?"

"Half a league or less."

"Oh! So close!"

"Yet there I lay while all Monterey looked for me," he reminded her. "I've noted this; people seeking anything, be it quarry or golden hope, have ever the way of overlooking what lies close at hand, and questing into the lands of purple distances! Have no fear, once we can find my place in this dark."

So again they pressed on, through thicket and grove, over a little hill, down into a gully full of water, up a long slope beyond, with at times the roar of pursuit in their ears and at other intervals only silence saving for the infrequent rustling of tree tops and the unceasing surge of old ocean. Captain Cavalier had fallen silent again and did not speak for a long time. They ploughed through still other brushy copses which tore at their garments and the skin of their hands; they paused briefly now and then; they made a winding way through the dripping woods. Gradually all sound of

pursuit was lost; as they turned westward or to the south of west, Hawk's pack of slavering beasts threshed the woods to the east.

"I think," whispered Virginia Luisa, "that they are all out looking for us. The *presidio* seems so quiet."

"Aye; so have I been thinking. He's offered them some high reward, be sure of it, to entice such from their carousing. And here's another thought: among any two hundred men there may always be one or two to have some brains! Therefore we go warily, since with the rest raising hue and cry to the eastward, some rascal may have had the thought to hang back and watch hereabouts."

So they trod as lightly as they might, avoided the brushy tangles with their snapping twigs and hastened all they could along a little winding, woodsy path. And now, so narrow and uneven was the way, they were forced to advance in single file, he trail-finding while she kept close at his heels. At moments the night wind brought them whiffs of salt sea spume and a muted dash of waves; sometimes a faint cry from afar; more often silence save for their own stealthy tread, the occasional snapping of a dead branch underfoot, the ceaseless patter of big drops of water shaken from tree and bush.

"We've given them the slip," Captain Cavalier whispered to her, waiting for her to come to his side. "And I am finding familiar obstacles here in this dark; a few paces, Virginia *mia,* and we lie safe hid in my cosy lair. More guardedly than ever now, since if we make sure none sees or hears us creep into it, none will find us there to-morrow."

Their hands found each other in the dark; a swift

confident pressure from his, a grateful squeeze from hers, and they crept forward. Through a dense grove now of Monterey pines, then to the edge of a little ravine thick with utter dark and made softly murmurous by a gaily plashing brook. Between boulders now, and so to the outer rim of a tangle of brushy growth.

"Five minutes now——"

"Sh! Listen! There's some one—something——"

His warning pressure of hand on hand silenced her whisper.

"Aye, I hear it!" he whispered back to her. "A bear, in all likelihood. Do you stand here, never moving, while I go ahead. Bruin or meddlesome human, he comes uninvited to my lair."

He drew his sword, and stealing forward as stealthily as an Indian, inched on toward the spot where both had heard the sound; such a sound as any animal would make passing through a thicket. So she lost all sight of him and, a moment later, all sound of his quiet footfalls. The great black silence shut her in once more; nothing to be seen though she strove with all her might to see; nothing to be heard except the drip-drip-drip of drops of water from twig and branch. He was not gone ten seconds before it seemed to her overwrought nerves as many minutes. She took a step to follow, fearful of being alone, then came to a sudden terrified halt, realising that she might take the wrong direction and thus be utterly lost to him. Even now it was difficult for her to be certain of what direction he had taken.

A new sound, sharp and sudden as an explosion, told her where he and the intruder were. A crashing through brush, the sound of a fall, and then a muffled

curse. After that a wild rush, headlong flight, and then silence. In a moment here was Captain Cavalier back at her side.

"You heard?" he whispered. "You know who it was?"

"Don Nicolas! He has followed us——"

"Nick Vara, sure enough, but not after us. Nor do I think that he knows who we are that appear to be after him! He's fled for his life. How he chanced here, I know not: perhaps because, knowing the lay of the land hereabouts, he realized as well as did I the advantages of this spot for one who would avoid notice. At any rate you may be sure that he asks but to go free himself this night. Harry Hawk, hounding us, would find some degree of savage satisfaction could he bag even Nick Vara."

"He may return?"

"Let him. But I think not."

"Or he may seek to make his peace with the others by telling them where we are!"

"No. First, because he cannot know it is we and not Harry Hawk himself nosing him out. Second, because now that he's once clear of Hawk, he'll think a long, long time before he puts his neck in the noose again. No, my Virginia, we are done with this Vara; come, let us occupy the place he has vacated for us."

A few steps brought them now to Captain Cavalier's chosen refuge. In the dark she could make little of it, saving that where he threw himself down, commanding her to do likewise, they were in a sheltered spot at the head of the steep ravine, that they were ringed about by boulders, that thick trees met overhead, and yet where they crept that it was snug and dry. Further,

that the brook sang softly in their ears and that no other sound reached them here.

"If only we were a little further away!"

"To avoid a sword thrust by a single hair's-breadth is as good as being overseas from it," he told her from his own book of philosophy. "And now, señorita, will your two little hands help my one in moving this flat rock here? Feel it? I've flint and steel and some dried stuff that will serve us as tinder——"

"You don't mean to light a fire!" she gasped.

"Aye," he muttered briefly. "You'll see by my arrangements that it's safe enough. And we must have it."

From the thicket he brought forth a blanket, rolled tight. This he spread with her help across the tops of the big rocks like a roof. They huddled under it, and he struck fire and got a small blaze going. The blanket above stopped passage of all flying sparks, while the rocks themselves and the trees and thicket and ravine banks made it impossible for one to see their illumination unless he came very close.

In the first ruddy flare of light she saw his face, and started back from him as from a spectre. She had never seen a man so deathly white; drops of sweat beaded his brow; a great smear of blood was across his cheek; his eyes seemed to burn with a fever.

He made to smile back at her, but there was little of mirth in the tense contortion of his rigid features.

"I'll be as right as a trivet in a minute," he told her. "If you'll grope under the dead leaves between those two stones you'll find certain articles which will be of interest to both of us: a handful of jerked beef, a stack of stale *tortillas* and a bottle of brandy."

She sprang up and hastened in her search, eager for the brandy, which she hoped might banish that white drawn look from his face. When she brought it to him he was already busied with his wound. She shuddered as she saw how his sleeve was soaked with blood.

"Health and happiness, little señorita," he said, and lifted the bottle, drinking deep. "And now—see how I call on you for everything!—if you'll take this dagger for me and help me slit the sleeve——"

The light was poor, yet even Captain Cavalier dared make no greater blaze, and in it she worked cautiously lest the sharp edge touch the flesh. Laying the sleeve aside she saw the wound, and at the sight went dizzy and sick, the dagger slipping from her fingers.

"A sip of this same brandy will hearten you," he said, seeing how white she went. "I regret that I have no cup, nor had the decency of manners to invite the lady to drink first!"

At his command she lifted the bottle, swallowed a mouthful of the fiery liquor, choking over it, but feeling it warm the very heart within her. Then, her lip caught between her teeth, forcing herself to steadiness, she sought to aid him. So together, he directing, they got the wound washed, bathed against infection with a dash of this same brandy, and then bound in strips of his shirt and cloak. After all of which he lay back, his eyes shut, resting a while.

She shut her own eyes, though she did not rest. Sitting over him, her hands tight clasped, she yielded herself up to agony. All that she had endured since quitting the Rancho del Rey last night to ride back to Monterey she endured over now as fitful flashes of recent horrors lived again with horrible sharpness of detail

in her excited mind. The long hours in Sola's closet, the comings and goings of Harry Hawk and his ruffians, Vara's swift visit and departure, Captain Cavalier finding her, the fight in the room, the flight to this place. From terror to terror, with safety ever remote. As now, forced to rest here so close to the *presidio* and its rabble, with Captain Cavalier wounded and looking next to death—— She opened her eyes and forgot herself for him, stooping over him, praying for him.

He, too, opened his eyes.

"We'd try to go on to a safer distance, Virginia," he said softly, "were it not that I know Harry Hawk well enough to know just to the jot what his methods will be. He'll spread out a sort of net; he'll offer his reward; he'll vow to make the priceless gift of you yourself to whatever man lays us by the heels; he'll make sure we don't travel toward your friends at the King's *rancho*. Therefore it were best if we lay close the night through, right where we are; thus we'll rest, and presently we'll eat and thereafter we'll sleep——"

"Sleep! Oh, señor——"

"Aye, sleep. For mark you, I'll wager that you had no more sleep last night than I; that you lived through a very devil's day of it to-day; and that your sweet body is well-nigh exhausted. So if now you will seek again in the hole where you found the brandy you'll unearth an iron pan. In it you'll warm a sup of water and brandy——"

Again she was all haste to obey. But when she brought him the hot drink he made her drink with him, and first this time. Then he coaxed her to start nibbling on a bit of food, after which she ate willingly and hungrily.

"Now for my spare blanket. Will you spread it close by, just where the rocks make that cosey corner? Next, will you in accepting of Captain Cavalier's poor hospitality overnight, wrap yourself up in it and in pleasant anticipations, overlooking the poverty of his accommodations set at your service, and, in most sweet generosity, promise him that one day, when he becomes a big *ranchero* here, you will grant him the privilege of wiping out all memory of to-night and its——"

She dropped the blanket and ran to him to fall on her knees at his side, catching up his hand in her two, even lifting it to her lips so that he felt what was like the spatter of warm raindrops upon it.

"Oh, I have been selfish, thinking ever of myself! You have been so good to me, señor—from the very beginning. And so strong and brave and noble! That you lie wounded now is because of me and——"

"That you came back into peril," he told her softly, "was because of me, Virginia Luisa!"

"Only to cause you still more trouble and danger! You who already, and for my sake, had made enemies of your old friends——"

"Not friends, señorita! Never; just a pack of dogs that hunted at my heels."

"And, with an enemy made too of Governor Sola, with never a single friend in all California——"

"Yet am I become a right *Californio!* As I told Sola himself. Meaning somehow to weather this storm and thereafter, come some bright gay and golden day, to have my own broad acres. And then——"

"And then, señor?"

His one hand drew her two hands closer so that at last they lay on his breast.

"And then to come to you, my most sweet lady——!"

She drew her fingers slowly through his and went to her blanket. The little fire burned down. She watched the last coal, then lay staring into the dark. After a long while a star swam out, and she watched it until it seemed to burn out like their fire. And now it was of him and no longer of herself that she thought. How he enheartened her! He speaking of the day when he meant to become one of California's *rancheros,* he wounded, weak and sick, with his enemies about him, seeking him; with all California against him! And so presently, with fatigue aided and abetted by the warm water and brandy he had made her drink, Virginia Luisa went to sleep.

She started wide awake in a dull sombre morning. Sitting bolt upright, she saw that he watched her where he lay. A pistol and his drawn sword lay at hand. He smiled as their eyes met.

"A new day is coming, señorita, and may it bring us good fortune."

She sprang up. Her hair came tumbling down in a glorious cascade, long and thick in rich billows; down and down until it reached to her waist. He sat up now, stirring somewhat stiffly and yet seeming to her anxious eyes bettered by a night of rest; pale yet, but scarcely so haggard. And the feverish look was gone from his eyes. In its place, shining clear, was the warmth of his eager admiration of her refreshened loveliness.

"As God's my judge," he said swiftly, watching her at work with the bounteous beauty of her hair, "you are the most radiant, dazzling little beauty in the wide, wide world!"

"You are better this morning?" she demanded hastily.

"Rested and stronger and myself again."

"I did not think I could sleep—and I slept the night through. And you? Did you sleep any?"

"With an ear cocked and one eye open," he told her. "An old habit and a useful one."

"Then—cannot we slip away now? Before it grows full daylight?"

"I, too, am tempted. 'Tis this way: your battery down on the beach did some considerable destruction aboard the pirate craft, and it is likely that Bouchard himself will have men hunting the woods through for timbers for his carpenters. Thus, they may come upon us. Also, were we to start guardedly and early, I think we may win clear of Harry Hawk's net, since at this time of day the ardor of such men as his burns low. Many will have counted us gone free already; others will sleep cosily against the chill of a bleak morning. Furthermore, the woods are thick to the south——"

"We must turn west, señor, to come to the Rancho del Rey——"

"But south, along the coast, to come at the end of forty or fifty miles to the head waters of a certain stream which flows through the *rancho* of your grandfather, Don Julian. A safer way for us to travel than the other. For it is most likely that Frenchy Bouchard, as well as Harry Hawk, wishing to know what your friends plan, will send forth scouting expeditions to the west and that we'll have a clearer way if we turn toward El Carmelo and on south."

On the instant she was all eagerness to go.

"For breakfast," said Captain Cavalier lightly, "we have water, brandy, jerked beef, and doubtful *tortillas*——"

"We can eat and drink as we go!"

"My thought! Come then, sweet lady. And God be with us this day."

They stole away while the light was still slowly brightening, the world about them slumbrously revealing itself. The tang of the sea was in the thick white fog borne landward and making ghostly the woodlands into which they passed. Captain Cavalier had made himself a small tight pack of food and wine; the blankets he left there, well hidden in the *manzanita* bushes.

"We go south toward that cove where first I saw you, Virginia mine. Some few miles this side of it I have that other rude shelter where I housed myself just after my good ship went on the rocks. If we may win that far during the day and early night, we sleep warm; otherwise we must shiver until another sun warms us or find us a nook for a camp fire. Thence we go up among the mountains you call the Santa Lucias, over their tops and find ourselves on the *rancho* of Don Julian. Once we are at a safe distance from Monterey we have perhaps some little degree of hardship, yet no danger to fear."

"Your wound, señor?"

"Is nothing. You cured it last night, señorita."

Then they grew silent, he leading the way, weaving their own tortuous path in a pathless wood, stopping often to peer out from some thick shelter and to listen. The sun had not yet cleared the hill-tops, and, as Cavalier judged, it was unlikely that Harry Hawk's hounds

would be evincing any high degree of vigilance at such an hour. Yet caution was the watchword, and remained so as the hours passed.

Keeping to the hollows of the hills, turning presently away from the ocean, making many a devious circuit to avoid the open spaces, they came in time to a gentle slope whence they might look down upon Carmel Mission. For the first time they heard voices; they lay hidden, and peered forth and thus saw a handful of men crossing a field, looking to right and left as they went, but whether for them or for plunder they could not know. The men disappeared beyond the mission walls, and the fugitives hastened on, dodging among thickets, shielding themselves behind trees.

"I know a little trail we can take for some miles," said Virginia Luisa when they stopped again to breathe. "It crosses the Rio Carmelo just yonder where you see those big laurels. Then, back and forth across the little river, it leads to a pretty spot where sometimes we used to go picnicking——"

"Later we'll hearken to its invitation," he returned thoughtfully. "For the present we were best to ignore it. If Harry Hawk suspects that we may turn this way, be sure he'll have men posted along all such trails. But if we keep to the thickets and woods for a few miles, say until high noon, thereafter, if your path still invites, we'll step into it."

It was in the nature of a revelation to her that this Captain Cavalier knew the first rudiments of caution. Ever she had found him plunging headlong into the thick of danger. And even now she suspected that, were he alone, there would be for him no such dodging and circuitous methods; wounded as he was,

one against many, it was easier for her to picture him bristling with fine bravado, even stalking boldly back into the pirate camp.

They kept back from the coastline now; they hastened down slope and made frequent stops in secluded spots; they penetrated no new bit of deep woodland without first pausing to peer and listen. He had recharged his pistols, looking very carefully to the priming and guarding painstakingly against wetting them in the dripping bushes.

There were many sounds about them, and at the least of them both grew tense and her heart pounded madly; a herd of deer broke cover and flashed up a ridge where they stood, pretty heads high, sniffing and staring; a bear crashed and lumbered away; a rabbit, the tiniest bundle of fur, made a startling racket, and even a bevy of quail, rising unexpectedly almost underfoot, tried quivering nerves. Yet slow mile after mile fell away behind them; on and on they went until the horrors of Monterey began to seem very far away.

All of a sudden—it was while they were sitting by a spring at midday, warmed by the late sun which at last had broken through the thinning films of mist—a new and disquieting thought burst upon her. Why had she not thought of so obvious a thing long ago?

"You are taking me back to my people," she cried abruptly, her eyes darkening with distress, "but what of you? Oh, señor; so great has been my own dread, I have not thought of that at all!"

He lifted his brows and managed a fleeting smile.

"Well, what of me, Virginia Luisa?"

"Even my mother," she said, finding the words difficult, "holds you to be our enemy—as bad as those

others, the pirates. Don Pablo cast you into jail; he had offered a reward for you, dead or alive——"

She broke off with a shudder.

"Aye," he said grimly. "I am like a grain of wheat skipping while I may between the upper and nether stone."

"And for my sake you are again putting yourself in danger——"

"For your sake," with an attempt at his little bow, "I'd enter the very gates of——"

He too broke off; suddenly, though his face remained white and haggard, his merry smile came dancing back.

"Once before, señorita, we spoke of certain gates. Remember?"

"Do I forget anything that has happened?" she murmured.

How his eyes could flash. What a man he was, worn down, wearied out, sick with his wound, to keep the fires still burning bright and high in his valiant soul. Yet in the end she sighed. For, Captain Cavalier though he was, he remained one man against all men.

"You will leave me before we come to Don Julian's home," she said at last. "I will find my way alone."

"I leave you only when I see you safe through the door," he said firmly. "And then——"

"Then, señor?"

He began plucking at a handful of glossy dry pine needles.

"Would you see more of me, señorita? Or would it be the greater relief to you to wave a last farewell from the portico, to go in and shut the door, and thus have done with the worries of this Captain Cavalier?"

"Oh, señor!—Yet how impossible for you to remain. For us to see each other after this."

"Impossible?" he meditated. He lay back and looked up at the gently stirring branches above. "I once held that word to be Chinese——"

"You said, señor?"

"I say forward! The world is before us, not behind. It is a fine exhilarating business to keep your face, not your back, turned upon life."

Now, whenever they could find any path leading in the general direction they would travel, they set foot in it. Such paths were not infrequent, trails of deer to water, once in a long while a trail where horsemen had travelled; later cattle trails when they came steadily closer to the outer fringes of the great *rancho* of Don Julian and the stock ranges of the mission San Antonio. It was growing late afternoon when Captain Cavalier, leading the way along such a path, came to a dead halt and stood looking down at a discovery to remind him that the dictates of caution remained even at all these leagues from Monterey.

"What is it?" she asked, hurrying up to him.

It was a silver shoe-buckle which, from the look of it, had lain here no great length of time. Whose?

She clutched his arm and looked about her wildly, expecting to see men springing out from any bush.

"They look for us everywhere——"

He had picked up the buckle and was studying it.

"Nick Vara's, I think," he told her. "For where else should Vara turn but this way? Not toward the inland and the Rancho del Rey, surely, dreading Sola's wrath now as greatly as Bouchard's or Hawk's. Methinks that fine gentleman has started on the long

journey all the way back to Mexico! He would walk when he must; he would, however, have little stomach for that sort of exercise. Therefore we may picture him hastening on ahead of us, meaning to strike over the ridge to Don Julian's *rancho,* to get him a horse there and to flee on south." He tossed the buckle away. "That is my reading of the matter, señorita."

"Let us stop, then! Let us hold back a little, so that he can go on far ahead."

"What, shall we concern ourselves with one man, and that man Nick Vara!"

"But you are wounded. Oh, I know how that great wound pains and weakens you. And he——"

"I am of a mind, señorita, if you can bear up, to walk on another league or so, to house you somewhat more cosily than last night. 'Tis in a spot where I lay some weary days after my ship went down; I've odds and ends there retrieved from the wreck. We'll not let Nick Vara interfere with our plans."

"At least we'll quit the trail and keep to the woods——"

"Not we, Virginia *mia!* He's ahead of us; 'tis we who hold the advantage. I've sworn that to-night, at Captain Cavalier's providing, you sleep sound upon a true bed, and with a fine cheery blaze to warm you. Shall we abjure so fine a dream for a fallen buckle? Come; we'll forget Vara and be at our shelter by sunset."

So at his insistence again they went on. But Vara was forgotten by neither. Twice before it grew dark they saw signs where he had passed before them; the marks of boot heels where wet earth had held the impress.

"You are tired, I know," Captain Cavalier said just after the sun slipped down into a bank of brilliant clouds. "You have endured more than I had thought any maid could. Yet, if you are of a mind to continue forth for something less than another hour, we come to my promised night's lodging. If not, why we may make us a camp here anywhere."

Hers was a smile as wan as his own, and on they went. And soon, in utter pitch dark, with the sudden angry boom of ocean in their ears, he led the way among giant boulders to his former abiding place.

"Now we shall have our rousing fire," he vowed. "Nay, none can see it save from the sea."

She had dropped down from weariness. But, as he knelt by a pile of dry faggots, she got to her feet and joined him. They had come many a hard mile to-day, and if she were borne down thus, what must be his condition? Together they got the first tiny blaze started; she hastened to help with the larger logs to which he set his one hand. A moment later they were bathed in warmth and dancing firelight.

"Note how the big rocks shut us in, from observation as well as from the winds. The creek is just there, at my very door. Yonder your bed, deep and thick in piney tips, and with blankets to spare. Something of a larder as well; ship's biscuits, smoked venison, the musket that brought it down, a bag of flour stowed under a rock; and above it all a sort of young palace, a house made of bits of wreckage. A noble pot to make broth in, a drop of brandy left to us—what do we lack? That log for you to sit on, señorita, a blanket for cushion and another for cloak. We dine; you go to sleep; and lo, it is morning coming, bringing

in the new day. We warm a little water, thus; a dash of brandy in it, and Captain Cavalier, standing, drinks deep to you, pledging you that your days of anguish are over; that, for you, the new sun, when he rises, ushers in all happiness——"

"And—for you, señor?"

"For me? Whatever you wish me, señorita!"

"But I wish you everything good! All happiness——"

"Every happiness?"

"Every happiness," she repeated softly.

"Why, then, whatever may come to pass after this night, look for me, Virginia Luisa, at any turning of the road. For surely——"

"Let me help you with your wound," she said hurriedly, abashed by something in his look, in his quickened voice. "We must bathe and dress it afresh."

Ignorant as she was of sword thrusts, she could not but understand that all was not well with Captain Cavalier's wound. A man should lie abed a full fortnight or longer with such a cut, whereas he had walked all day long, forging on until both were nigh complete exhaustion. Here was a red, irritated and angry gash that had bled profusely and that seemed in her eyes in far worse state than when last she had seen it. She looked from it up into his face; dead white was he, with twin spots of hot color in his cheeks, while his eyes burned like coals of fire. She dropped her eyes swiftly that he might not read her look of alarm, and busied herself tenderly with the wound. When it was done he thanked her quietly and turned away.

When each lay blanket enwrapped and their fire had burned down to a bed of coals, she could hear him

stirring restlessly. Later exhaustion forced her deep down into the unconsciousness of a sleep that was like that induced by a drug. She awoke to hear him muttering, and after the first groping moment sprang up and went to him. He had tossed off his blankets, and she covered him. She brought him the last of the brandy, but he thrust it away and fell to muttering again. She returned to her blankets and sat huddled in them, shivering with a new sort of dread. Presently he grew quiet and seemed to sleep. And again she slept heavily.

The high sun in a clear sky woke her. Her first thought was for him. When she went to him he turned slowly and looked up curiously into her eyes. He was burning with fever.

"Did Vara come?" he asked sharply.

"No. No one——"

"Not little Harry Hawk, then?"

"No, señor. No one at all."

He frowned; with all his might he strove with ugly chimeras which made a mock of him, masking truth and shadowing reason.

"A little loss of blood," he muttered. "A temporary weakness. You're safe. I've no fear for you now."

With flint and steel her unaccustomed hands labored long getting the fire going. How little she could do for him who had done so much for her! The hot brandy, a hot broth of venison set bubbling at his rude fireplace of flat stones. If only her mother were here, she who knew how to do everything at a sick bed! If only her little grandmother, the white-haired La Mariposa, were here. Oh, what a poor useless thing she herself was. The hot tears were rolling down

her face when she went back to him to set a cup to his dry lips.

"I'll be all right—don't you worry, my most sweet lady——"

Yet, as he sank back, muttering vague nothings, he looked anything but all right. She stood with hands locked hard, engulfed in a new strange and crushing emotion, one of loneliness. He ignored her; it was almost as if he had gone away, leaving her.

"There's always a way out of any bad mess," Captain Cavalier was saying over and over.

She tried to smile as she looked down upon him.

"Yes," she said as bravely as she could. "Of course there is."

"With enemies all about me—what if I tricked them all!"

"You can!"

"I can! If——"

"If?"

"If I die!"

And he began laughing.

She flung about at that, running away to hide her face. If he died! He began babbling, but those words, "If I die!" kept beating insistently in her brain.

If he died! What, then, for her?

Angry with herself for her silly tears, she dashed them away and came back to him. On her knees, his hand caught in hers, she knelt over him.

"Señor, will you make me a promise?"

"Aye, with a will. What should I refuse you, my Virginia?"

"I am going—for a little walk. Out there in the warm sunshine. And you will lie quiet where you are?

Even though it seems long? Will you promise me, *mi capitán?*"

He lay frowning up at her, and presently, his eyes drifting away, fell to plucking at the blanket which she had drawn up about him. So long was he silent that she began to think he had forgotten or else had not heard. But presently he turned toward her again, that same drawn, tense expression upon his face, that same look in his eyes of one who fought hard to come through fever's chimeras to truth and reason.

"I am a little feverish," he said quietly. "We both realize that. But it is nothing; a bit of discomfort subsequent to a sword cut. You ask me to lie still until you come back? What if in my fever I forget my promise?"

"Do you know, señor," she said gently, "that I have come to think of you that, were your promise once given to me, not even delirium would make you forget it!"

The old-fashioned flash came back into his eyes.

"Right!" he cried. "Go forth into your sunshine, Virginia *mia.* You have my promise; return when you will, you find me here. Waiting for you."

She withdrew slowly. As she went she heard him babbling again:

"A right *Californio!* . . . I told Sola that. But what did he know? . . . A *ranchero* later. . . . And then, my promise to my most sweet lady. . . . Is that you, Vara? You, Harry Hawk? . . . Come now, and all together; strike up on the old guitar, Virginia Luisa. A rousing song does it."

He was singing cheerily.

CHAPTER XX

Captain Cavalier dashed a hand across his eyes, which he had shut savagely; opened them again, and finding, despite his effort, that he was still hard beset by unreasoning chimera and lying vision, shut his eyes with greater determination than ever and fell to muttering:

"I promised I'd wait here until she came back, and wait I will. She's gone to walk in the sunshine. But she's away such an unconscionably long time! It's more than an hour since she left me——"

A very soft, wonderfully sweet voice almost at his ear spoke, saying in that tone which one uses to a sick child:

"What do you say, señor?"

His eyes flew open once more, and he began a furious blinking as though by batting his lids he could dissipate the entire legion of fever's minions. At his side there was—nay, there *appeared* to be—a little, pretty, and altogether dear old lady with snowy white hair half hid under a lacy black mantilla; one who, he thought, might well be his own Virginia Luisa herself, say a hundred years hence. Her hand, very soft and gentle and practised in the way of healing her sick, lay on his brow—rather, seemed to do so. For, having been tricked long enough by visions which one after the other turned out to be but empty mockery, he had come to the point when he refused to be put upon. This little old lady now, dear and sympathetic and

cosey and motherly, he knew her to be a piece with the rest of this entire figment; the white walls of the comfortable little room in which he found himself, the window yonder giving glimpses of the vine wreathing it, a distant hill dotted with great oaks, a more distant patch of blue, blue sky, the very bed on which he lay. A deep feather bed, rose-scented linen sheets with daintily embroidered hems—what had Captain Cavalier to do with such?

"You are awake, señor?" asked the same low, gentle voice.

"Aye, I'm awake," he muttered into his pillow. "Awake and seeing visions! You are a vision; a grand dame out of some romance I read once on a time. Yes, awake, I talk with visions." He began groping about the bed, seeking something. "I promised I'd lie here until she came back. To make sure, I bound myself with bits of thong; I tied double knots and set to work to forget how to untie them——"

The door opened softly. Captain Cavalier had the odd sensation, which in itself was quite apiece with his many other kaleidoscopic impressions, that he who entered tiptoeing had just stepped down from the frame of some old masterpiece. A very old gentleman, tall and thin and aristocratic, with pointed beard and curling hair snowed upon by the same years which had passed over the sprightly head of the little old lady at his side; one who was in all essentials her most perfectly complementary mate. He was clad in a rich elegance with more than a dash of color in it, gleaming in silver buckles, glowing in sash and jacket lining.

"Sh! He is just awake, Don Julian," whispered the one at the bedside.

"And grown much better! Ah, 'tis you, Mariposa *mia,* who can draw a man back from the gates of death. Did you not once do as much for me?"

So these visions pretended to be Don Julian and his Mariposa? Her grandfather and grandmother? Captain Cavalier, beginning to lose some degree of confidence in his own recently taken stubborn attitude of denial of all things, began again that furious blinking meant to drive away fever's creatures. In a moment he would be believing that this was reality about him; then what a crushing hopelessness when he awoke again only to find himself lying alone by the ocean!

He lay very still, debating this baffling matter with himself. If what he saw and heard about him was real instead of fancied, why then he must be at the *hacienda* of Don Julian. Yet how could that be? When Virginia Luisa had left him an hour or so ago he had been near the beach, which he knew was a dozen or fifteen miles from this place!

It was altogether too much for him. He was still puzzling over it when he slipped off to sleep.

When he awoke again it was to look sharply about him. For it was with some memory of all this, but such a memory that it might be nothing but a dream. How he feared to find himself again, and for the thousandth time, enduring that agony of watching a beautiful dream fall into ash-heaps about him.

Thinking himself alone, he sought to rear up on an elbow, the better to look about him, but sank back weakly and with a groan. Some one rose swiftly from the chair at his side; he turned his head and saw Virginia Luisa bending over him.

"Sh!" she commanded, when he would have spoken. "I will run, and tell *mamagrande* you are awake."

"Wait," he pleaded. "Tell me; am I delirious? Or —where are we, Virginia?"

"At the *rancho* of Don Julian. And you are getting better. Oh, señor——"

He studied her curiously. He noted how she no longer wore the torn riding-habit in which he had seen her last; how she looked rested and fresh and more dazzling than ever, how she must have bathed and set her hair in order, with its enormous bejewelled comb—how he had never seen so pretty a dress or so pretty a girl to wear it. . . .

"How came we here? When?"

But again she commanded silence, this time with a finger on her lips, and went rustling to the door and, with a most glorious smile, like the smile of springtime of a glad morning, passed out. The door closed softly, was shut a moment only, opened as softly, and here came the dear little old lady.

"Señora—tell me——"

Had she learned that trick of a tender smile from her granddaughter? Or had she given it through inheritance to Virginia Luisa? She sat down by him, took his hand in her two, patting it in her dear motherly way, and smiled more brightly than ever.

"You dear boy! You've had a hard time of it, but you're a fighting man—just like my own Don Julian in his own time! Tell you? Of course I will. Everything? And why not? Only a little by little."

"I've had fever—I've messed up fact and fiction—I don't know——"

She touched his brow with her smooth fingers.

"A terrible fever, but that's over now. Just as cool! God be thanked, señor. Yes, yes; I know all about what troubles you. Virginia came running to

us in the night; that's nearly three weeks ago, señor. She led the way back to where she had left you. Don Julian went; our Great Picton and his sons with him, and they brought you here. To me, señor, who love to nurse the sick. So I put my silly little granddaughter to bed and I put you to bed, and I set to work making two half-dead youngsters well. You are now out of all danger; soon you'll be sitting up, eating everything and getting fat! And now—no more talking."

There were a hundred questions he would have asked, but under this tenderness and gentleness there was to be sensed a certain firmness that was not to be denied.

Later on in the day Don Julian himself came into the room for a brief call upon his guest. At the doorway he stopped to make his deep courtly bow, the bow of fifty years ago. Then he came to the bed, for a moment clasping Captain Cavalier's hand in quiet cordiality.

"My wife, señor, allows me five minutes with you. That I may assure you that you, who from the beginning have been our beloved little granddaughter's protector and savior, honor us very highly by lingering a little under our roof. You will believe me, señor, that the house and everything in it are yours. We are in all things your servants."

"It is you whom I must thank—for my very life, it seems. My only regret——"

The slim white hand lifted arrested his words.

"No regrets, señor." Don Julian smiled pleasantly. "Such are my wife's commands. She orders always good cheer and happiness to her invalids—along with

the nasty-tasting stews and brews of herbs on which she will take so keen a joy in dosing you."

He sat down, drawing his chair close, and added:

"We understand that your mind will be filled with much to make for unrest until you have had information upon this and that. Bouchard's vandals, as you know, sacked Monterey; they spent some few days there while our governor was gathering reinforcements at the Rancho del Rey. By the time Don Pablo was ready to march back to the coast, Bouchard had fled south. He struck at the Refugio Rancho and then appeared off Santa Barbara. My friend the comandante there, Señor de la Guerra y Noriega, tricked him by marching his handful of men across a little open space in such manner as to make the pirates think he had an army! There was some parley, an exchange of prisoners——"

"Molina?" asked Captain Cavalier.

Don Julian laughed.

"Yes, Molina was returned to us. Poor old Molina! For Don Pablo, I think, would have been glad if Bouchard had carried him clean off. As it is, Molina is ordered back to jail to finish his unexpired term. Well, señor, at any rate we have seen the last of Bouchard, who struck a final foul blow at Mission San Juan Capistrano and departed; and Don Pablo already prepares to rebuild poor little Monterey.

"As you know, we were at Santa Barbara when the attack was delivered upon Monterey. We returned here, and a couple of days later my daughter-in-law, the mother of Virginia Luisa, brought my son, Don Hilario, here suffering from a slight wound. The first thing she did was ask for Virginia, who had ridden

away from the Rancho del Rey, as her mother thought, to come here. Oh, we had our hour of consternation, señor! But see how things end happily. For while I was gathering a force of men to go with me, back to Monterey seeking everywhere for this little wild thing Virginia Luisa, here came she herself, half dead from fatigue, to tell of your plight.

"And now, as you shall see in a day or so with your own eyes, when you can sit in the sun, we shall have with us soon Don Hilario and his wife, our little Virginia again, two of my sons, seven of my daughters and daughters-in-law, cousins more than you shall ever count, and friends in numbers to gladden any man. Refugees, señor, whom we are to be so fortunate as to have with us. You see, we shall turn our California's misfortune into a grand picnic! Later, when you are better, there will be barbecues and dancing and lots of noise and fun!"

"You would seem—to have your hands full—without me——"

Don Julian, spreading out his hands, looked horrified.

"Is it possible, señor, for us to have more of our own friends with us than it gives us great joy to welcome? It is at times like this that life is filled up to the brim with happiness. What else is life for? Ah, señor, if it had not been given us to have you with us at this time, I should have been saddened all my life long!"

Captain Cavalier sought words to express his gratitude. Presently, bethinking him of his own unsolved problems and of Governor Sola, he asked:

"And what of Don Pablo? He is not here?"

"No, señor. For he has been, and still is, very busy planning all that must be done anew at Monterey."

"Does he know—that I am here?"

A sudden frown darkened Don Julian's fine, cheery face.

"I do not understand Don Pablo in this," he said slowly. "He is my friend and a man of the highest honor. Yet I have heard how he had you clapped into jail. No, he does not know that you are here; none, outside my own household, knows that, señor. When you grow well, you shall be free to depart, Don Pablo Sola or no Don Pablo Sola."

"No doubt he has forgotten me——"

"You should know the truth, señor. He has recently offered a fresh reward for your capture and delivery over to him. But," and Don Julian shrugged with fine disregard of any such thing, "you may be as sure here as if you were around the world from California, that not even Governor Sola shall put your freedom in the slightest jeopardy. You remain with us secretly until you are restored to strength and vigor. Thereafter, I have men and horses to put at your disposal; you shall go where you would."

Captain Cavalier fell to staring at the heavy beams across the ceiling. Free to go where he listed. Free—but to go. Aye; there was the rub! When he asked only to stay, to become *Californio*.

"What of Nicolas Vara?" he asked suddenly.

A terrible look shone in Don Julian's eyes, while his two hands clenched into hard fists.

"Virginia Luisa told us everything. My Picton heard; his sons heard. You have not seen them, señor? They are half Indian. They adore the little

señorita; to them she is a goddess. They said nothing when they heard, but they went away that night and were gone ten days. They can follow a track as a dog follows a hot scent. What they told Picton when they returned I do not know; I know only that he told me that we were not likely ever again to hear of that traitor Vara."

After that Don Julian went away, and for a long time Captain Cavalier lay silent, plunged deep into his own sombre thoughts.

Day by day and both steadily and swiftly he grew stronger. He drank of Doña Mariposa's broths and brews, he slept deeply and long, he awakened each time with new vigor. During this time he had only tantalizing glimpses of Virginia Luisa. When he was awake her grandmother came to him and sat with him, chatting cheerily of this and that; old Don Julian paid his respects morning and night; the great Picton himself was allowed to look in on him every day, always with a lusty: "Ho! my young master! You are as strong as a horse to-day, eh?"

But of Virginia Luisa he saw little. Now and then, when he had been sleeping and awoke suddenly, he caught his glimpse of her: she had been sitting by the window in his room, but rose hastily at the first stir from him, flooded his very soul with that glorious, grateful smile, and hastened to tell her grandmother that he was awake. Sometimes she came back for an instant; but only when some one else was in the room, and at such times a strange sort of shyness kept her eyes down and her lively tongue stilled.

So, as he grew stronger and his wits returned with health, he strove to trick her. When he awoke, his

mind being charged with this before he went to sleep, he lay very still, opening his eyes only enough for him to peep through his lashes. Knowing that if he caught her at all he would find her at the window, he had slept on his left side.

There she sat, her hands folded in her lap, her eyes on his face, as she rocked softly, noiselessly in her chair. He marked how her long ear-rings swung back and forth rhythmically, glinting and glowing in the light pouring in through the vines. He studied at his leisure curve of throat and chin; he marked the exact spot where, should she smile, a dimple would appear; he observed how her curls hid her ears, which propriety commanded be concealed down to the necessary tips pierced for their swinging pendants.

She was dreaming-awake. She smiled a little, somewhat wistfully; she sighed deeply; her eyes grew limpid and then cleared swiftly to some bright, golden-winged hope of future.

He thought soberly:

"I'll soon be strong enough to mount a horse and ride away. Out of California——"

He, too, sighed, and she looked at him with quick suspicion. But he lay still, breathing regularly, and thought further:

"Why should she sit here with me like this—unless she, too, cares a little bit? And if she does, what governor, either single-handed or with all the troops in California at his back, is going to drive me away?"

She was leaning closer now, her eyes very intent. Slowly a little warm flush crept up into her cheeks.

"Señor," she whispered, "you are unfair!"

"And you, most sweet lady, are very fair indeed."

As quick as a flash his hand shot out, and though she sprang up, caught hers and held it tight. So tight, indeed, that she was forced to sink back into her chair.

"I must go," she gasped. "*Mamagrande*——"

"Your *mamagrande* is a most rare angel," he laughed at her. "But 'tis you I want just now. Tell me, Virginia *mia*——"

"No, no! It is not proper, señor! You take advantage; you must remember we are all alone here—without a chaperone——"

He laughed even more delightedly.

"You and your chaperones! What, did we lack them before? When we first met in Smugglers' Cove? When we rode by night? When we adventured in Monterey? When, thereafter, we turned again southward? A fig for your proper conventions!"

"Oh, señor! But it was different with us then——"

"Different? Just how, my most sweet captive?"

"I was a foolish, silly girl——"

"And now? Is it years and not mere weeks that I have lain here? Are you grown from girl to woman, then, señorita?"

"I—I think that I have," she whispered uncertainly. A new look dawned in her eyes, the surge of color crept up to her brow.

"Virginia!"

But with a sudden skilful twist she was free, up and away, laughing back at him from the doorway, crying softly:

"All right, señor; I will do as you wish and tell *mamagrande*——"

Now Captain Cavalier began to find this the very deuce of a situation, one to baffle, irritate, and finally

downright anger him. No more of that sweet intimacy now, though every opportunity lay at hand. With sudden impatience and swift determination, he scrambled out of bed. His clothes were just yonder across the small room in a closet. How stupidly weak he was! Yet he managed his brief journey, bolted his door against invasion and certain opposition were he apprehended, and began a hasty dressing.

He heard pleasant sounds. Voices in the kitchen; a guitar tinkling; Virginia Luisa singing happily. He hastened with what he had to do. If they gave him another moment he would be arrived at the triumphant end of the little task, and they would have to accept him on his feet. He crept back to the table with its rosewood dressing case. His first good look into a mirror shocked him; what a cadaverous-looking, wild-eyed devil of a fellow this was! He had been shaved only this morning by Don Julian's own personal servant; how hollow his cheeks were. Better had he left a growth of beard to mask his gauntness.

With difficulty he dragged on his boots. Now, stepping softly, he went to his door. The hall was empty. He stepped out, and, steadying himself with a hand against the wall, went toward the front of the house —toward Virginia Luisa's light-hearted singing. The main *sala,* also, was empty; he made his pilgrimage through it, tacking this way and that, from chair to table. Thus, all unobserved, he came to the front door and looked out on the vine-covered portico. Outside was full glorious sunlight. There were benches. On one sat Virginia Luisa, strumming and humming. He came on and sank down at the nearer end. She turned—and screamed aloud.

"You can't run away from me—any longer," he began.

But that was exactly what she did. She sped into the house, but to return on the instant with a brimming cup of wine. At her heels came her grandmother.

"He is delirious again!" cried the girl. "See how white he is!"

"He is a bad boy," said the little old lady. And then smiled at him encouragingly, and came to pat his shoulder, to take the cup from her granddaughter's hands and make him drink. Thereafter they sped for wraps and a foot-rest; hurried to the kitchen to order hot broth; hung up a blanket to shut off any draught—and for some moments gave him no chance for a single word.

"I am as well as ever," he said as he set down the empty cup. "I must be up and about and so regain my strength. Then, in a day or so, I shall be able to accept Don Julian's offer of a horse, and ride away——"

The grandmother looked at him sharply; the granddaughter started. He went on steadily, looking straight at Virginia Luisa now.

"Is it your desire, señorita, that I ride away from California? For always?"

As quick as a flash she became all demureness, dropping her eyes as young girls were taught to do, saying simply:

"We are all your friends here, señor. So we should be sad to see you ride away."

"I do not speak of friendship," he said stubbornly. "You know that. Nor do you answer me. Do you,

just you yourself, wish me to ride? Or is it possible that you would have me stay?"

She looked up swiftly at his words, shot a quick glance at her grandmother, and of a sudden fled. Only from the door, as she slipped into the house, did she again flood the very soul of him with her smile.

"Señora," sighed Captain Cavalier as Doña Mariposa stood at his side, her very attitude inviting confidence, "you know how it is with me. A man dreams his dreams; have I been a fool to dare dream mine?"

She, too, smiled, curiously.

"A man is a fool, my son, not to dream his dreams. But now, wait. Let me talk again with Don Julian——"

"Again?" he said eagerly.

She nodded brightly, and laughed.

"For," she continued, "Don Julian is a great friend of Don Pablo. And who knows? His Excellency is not a cruel man and not an ungenerous——"

"But Virginia Luisa herself? She flees from me——"

"And you, señor, grow strong apace! How many days before you may run as fast after her?"

But here came Don Julian, riding swiftly in from the fields. As he swung down from the saddle and came to them with enormous spurs clanking mightily, the first glance at his face told them that something was amiss."

"Señor," he said, offering his hand after his graceful bow, "I rejoice to see you are given permission to be about; that means you grow well. Thee, my little one," he said, lifting his wife's hands to his lips, "I congratu-

late upon your success with our distinguished guest——'

"Quick, Don Julian," she commanded him. "What is it? What is wrong?"

"It's Don Pablo Sola," said Don Julian bluntly. "I don't understand the man. He gave Captain Cavalier his word of honor, as we know, to set him free and then clapped him into jail. Later, he offered a reward for his capture. And now it would appear that he has come to suspect that we harbor him here. A rider came to me from Monterey, sent by my son Hilario, to say that Sola himself with a squad of soldiers is leaving almost immediately—to come here."

"Don Pablo has no right! This is our home and shall not be invaded by the king himself without our invitation! And any whom we have as guest here——"

"Will not be taken from us!" cried Don Julian as firmly. "I have assured Captain Cavalier that he is safe with us.

But now Captain Cavalier spoke for himself.

"You are such wonderful friends to me—but I may not accept all that you would so generously and so willingly give. You have honored me most highly; while I live I shall never forget. But it would be but a poor return were I to allow trouble between you and your friend the governor to grow out of this. I grow strong, as you see. Don Julian has already offered me a horse. Before Don Pablo can arrive, I shall be gone."

"No, no!" cried Doña Mariposa. "We will not allow——"

But Captain Cavalier stood up, pale and determined.

"Señora, you and yours must not be drawn into this

quarrel. That would be unthinkable. No, I must go. But to return; I swear it. Time wears away mountains."

"We shall talk further, señor," said Don Julian. "At least there is no haste. I have sent two *vaqueros* speeding down to the mission; one rides even further, watching the road from Monterey. At the first sign of Don Pablo's approach we shall be warned. Also, I have told everything to my good old rascal Picton; he is your friend, señor, since that first night when you and he met. Night and day he will have horses saddled and ready, the fastest on my *rancho*—which means, I think, the fastest in all California. Now, while you rest we shall plan, my wife and I."

Captain Cavalier, too, did his own planning. He returned to the little room which to him had been so kind a haven and lay on his bed, resting, calling upon his iron will to aid his emaciated body in making its quick, necessary return to strength. He thought to find himself for the first time in his life about to accept the obvious. That meant flight. Unless he were of a mind to stake his life in a game of pure madness he must quit California. And of a sudden he no longer held his personal security with his aforetime lightness; life had during these few sweet, quiet days grown to have a new meaning, a fresh, golden value. He could make his way down to Mexico; there was fighting there, revolution carrying its bloody standards stubbornly on, meaning to sweep down monarchy and so come to national freedom. He, too, could strike a blow against King Fernando. That would be a blow delivered with all his might against Sola, since Sola drew his authority from the throne itself. Topple

over the king and throne, thus topple over Don Pablo along with them. A new régime, a new government for Mexico and for California—and here, riding a fine white horse, came Captain Cavalier, back to California —back to Virginia Luisa. . . .

"If she will wait for me! It will be a year, two years, or three at the utmost."

In this new path of following the obvious, it became clear that he must have a talk with her.

Night came, serene and starry. And in the first hour of dark, one of Don Julian's *vaqueros,* riding hard, returned to the *rancho.*

"Don Pablo is at the mission," was the word he bore. "He dines there with the fathers. Then, leaving a dozen of his soldiers there, he rides on to visit you, bringing six men with him."

"I am ready, my friends," said Captain Cavalier, smiling. He tapped the sword and pistols once more at his belt. "First, may I make my farewells to your granddaughter? Alone—for once, señora?"

He knew where she was to be found; under a certain arbor down at the foot of the garden. He made them his bow and hurried away.

"I have sent word to Picton," muttered Don Julian. "The two horses are ready. Picton himself will ride with him the first lap of his journey, showing him the short trails—and watching over him, to report to us. Also Picton has letters to friends all along the way——"

"God bring him through in safety—and in safety bring him back to us——"

"They are in the garden, saying *adios,*" whispered Don Julian. "Ah, Mariposa *mia,* why could it not be otherwise?"

"Were our Virginia like a certain Mariposa of thine —fifty years ago, Don Julian—I think that they still might find the way!"

"What? Madness!"

"And were we not mad, once on a time?"

"Listen! Horses already! Don Pablo rides in haste!"

The hooves came on, pounding mightily. Don Julian and his lady, both grim-lipped and stiffened haughtily, went to their door. Don Pablo dismounted and came forward, both great hands out, crying heartily:

"My friends! To come to you after this vast desert of not seeing you is to come to paradise. Señora, I kiss your adored hands. Señor—— Eh? What? What is this, my friends?"

His hands dropped slowly to his sides; neither had offered to take them, and neither had spoken. But now Don Julian, very dry of speech, demanded:

"Might one ask what errand bestows upon us the honor of an unannounced visit from His Excellency?"

Sola stared and frowned and muttered. Then, like a peal of jovial summer thunder his laughter amazed them.

"Into the house and the full light, *amigos!*" he cried cheerily. "What, am I, the guest, the one who must invite thus? For shame!"

And still laughing, he passed an arm through Don Julian's stiff one and another arm gently about the slim waist of little old La Mariposa, and so bore them along into the *sala.*

"Were you come only in friendship, señor——" began Don Julian, mightily mystified.

"Yet I come in no such case," returned Sola bluntly. "I learn that you harbor one here whom I have sworn to lay by the heels. What, are you become both traitors to California and to me? So, we'll have our business over with in a trice; we'll put on this Sir Captain of Adventure such shackles as I have made for him; and then, business forgot, we'll drink and laugh and play together. A dance at the end, as usual?"

"I had meant to come to you, Don Pablo," said Don Julian sternly, "about this same Captain Cavalier. He has become our friend; our very, very dear friend."

"Where is he now?" demanded Sola sharply. "My men have surrounded the house, my friends; he is a fool to think of escape."

Doña Mariposa, who had remained speechless though bristling with indignation all this while, now suddenly flamed out passionately, berating this governor of California after such a fashion as to make even her husband gasp. When she had done Don Pablo mopped a hotly flushed face, glared at her a moment, then laughed, and laughing, jumped up and caught her two hands.

"Oh, but you do me good, you two. Such friends, such loyal hearts. Well, now you shall listen; having scolded me, you shall be scoled. What, am I an ogre, then? Am I a man lost to all honor?"

"You pledged your word to set him free——"

"A thousand devils!" shouted Sola. "Can I say nothing? Set him free! Tell me, are you bereft of reason? How may I redeem my word and how may I set him free—*without having him captive first?*"

How they stared at that, bewildered and amazed.

"I should have set him free back there at the *presidio* but that, suddenly attacked by the pirates, I was forced to detain him briefly as I wanted further speech with him about that villain Vara. So I put him where he would be safe. The attack came. I grew worried. So, for a moment, I forgot him. Then I slept. Then I remembered and hastened to find him—and he was gone!"

"But why——"

"I did not know where he was. I knew no way to find him. I knew that he would not trust himself back in my hands, no matter what I promised. So, learning him to be here, I came—to capture him so that I might show him that Sola's word is the word of Sola. To set him free. And now, where is he?"

A groan broke from Don Julian.

"Gone! The horses have been ready all day. Gone, and like the wind, half an hour ago. He left us to say farewell to our granddaughter——"

"Where is she?" Sola was on the instant tremendously moved. "Send for her. Bring her to me."

They ran for her. She was not in her room, where her grandmother was so certain she would find her weeping. Nor in the garden, though the servants ran and called.

"She, too, is gone!" Doña Mariposa turned accusing eyes upon Don Pablo. "You have brought us a great sorrow, señor. We shall never see her again."

What a man for lightning moods Don Pablo was to-night. First he frowned and then laughed. Lightly he clapped Don Julian on the shoulder.

"We must do something for this young fellow! He wants a big *rancho*. He told me. Well, with so many

unused acres in California, I can manage that! You'd start him with a fat herd of cattle? Of course. And Don Hilario must do something; Doña Manuela certainly."

They looked at him as though they thought him mad.

"Don't you understand? He is gone."

Sola smiled.

"Were he any other man, that would mean that we should never see him again. But being Captain Cavalier—where will he go?" he demanded sharply.

"Toward safety, to be sure," said Don Julian dryly. "Which means out of the country."

Sola chuckled.

"We need not worry. Oh, we'll have them back soon enough! For I'll tell you this of him: he will go just exactly the opposite way of the one you expect! Now, bethink you, where is the nearest priest?"

"Why, at the mission——"

"And not ten miles from the tip of my long nose! Put a boy on a horse, Don Julian, and race him to the mission. There our Captain Cavalier will be found, forcing some poor padre at the pistol's point to marry them."

"But—you left soldiers there—he knows! To ride thither, believing you an enemy, would be madness!"

"That settles it. Beyond a doubt!" shouted Sola. "Send your man to see, my friend. Oh, he's a right *Californio,* that young fellow."

Sola was right.

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